8 rəcəb 1328 Beşimci il 4 июля 1910 г.

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№ 26 Qiymәti 12 qәpik. МОЛЛА НАСРЕДДИНЪ ...a 12 k. № 26



Slavs and Tatars Presents

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*Slavs and Tatars Presents*
*Molla Nasreddin:*
*the magazine that would've,*
*could've, should've*

**Edited by Slavs and Tatars**
**Design by Slavs and Tatars**
**Lithography by Tadeusz Mirosz**
**Printed and Bound by Die Keure, Brugge, Belgium.**
**Printed in the EU.**

**This publication is part of the artists' books series Christoph Keller Editions published by JRP|Ringier, Zurich**



**ISBN 978-3-03764-212-2**



We first came across *Molla Nasreddin* several years ago on a cold winter day in a second-hand bookstore near Maiden Tower in Baku. It was bibliophilia at first sight. Its size and weight, not to mention print quality and bright colour, stood out suspiciously amongst the more meek and dusty variations of Soviet brown in old man Elman's place. We stared at *Molla Nasreddin* and it, like an improbable beauty, winked back at us.

Published between 1906 and 1930, *Molla Nasreddin* was a satirical Azeri periodical edited by Jalil Mammadguluzadeh (1866-1932), and named after the legendary Sufi wise man-cum-fool of the Middle Ages[1]. With an acerbic sense of humour and compelling, realist illustrations reminiscent of a Caucasian Honoré Daumier or Toulouse Lautrec, *Molla Nasreddin* attacked the hypocrisy of the Muslim clergy, the colonial policies of the US and European nations towards the rest of the world and the venal corruption of the local elite, while arguing repeatedly and convincingly for Westernisation, educational reform and equal rights for women. The magazine was an instant success – selling half its initial print run of 1000 on its first day – and within months would reach a record-breaking circulation of approximately 5000 on its way to becoming the most influential and perhaps first publication of its kind to be read across the Muslim world, from Morocco to India.[2]

*Molla Nasreddin* managed to do in a pre-capitalist world what today's media titans, in an uncertain, post-capitalist world, can only dream of: speak to the intelligentsia as well as the masses.[3] Roughly half of each eight-page issue featured illustrations , which made the weekly accessible to large portions of the population who were illiterate. Tales and anecdotes of Nasreddin, the figure after whom the periodical derives its name, are told repeatedly throughout Eurasia. His reassuring character, in characteristic robe and slippers, appears on several of the weekly's covers, gesturing towards the main narrative of the illustration, with a wry smile, reminiscent of a proto-game show host or weather man. Perhaps, more importantly, the decision to publish in Azeri Turkish and not Russian as was protocol proved to be a *coup*: increasing the reach of the magazine beyond the urban contexts of the Russian Empire (Tbilisi, Baku) into smaller towns and provinces across the region.

1. Nasreddin is a satirical populist philosopher-cum-fool who purportedly lived during the 13th century in the Ottoman Empire. A version of the Sufi figure can be found from the Balkans to China. He is often preceded by the title 'Molla' or 'Hodja'.

2. To put these figures in perspective, the top papers in circulation today in Azerbaijan have an approximate print run of 25,000 for a population of 9 million. During the time of MN's publication, Azerbaijan had a population of roughly 2.5 million, of which it is safe to say that a very small percentage was literate.

3. Omar Faeq Namanzadeh, one of the contributing editors of the weekly, said with exemplary Caucasian pathos: 'When the struggling masses read the publication, it was as if thorns were removed from their hearts… The reason for this large impact was mostly due to fact that the authors of the texts and drawings understood the pain in their hearts, the sound of blood flowing from their wounds, the wailing of their hearts and dreams.' Aziz Mirahmedov, ed., (Baku: *Molla Nəsrəddin* (Baku: Azərbaycan Dövlət Nəşriyyatı, 1996).

## ABOUT AZERBAIJAN

In the two and a half decades that transpired between the first and last issue of *Molla Nasreddin*, the country at the heart of the magazine's polemics and caricatures – Azerbaijan – changed hands and names three or four times, depending on one's reading of history. Boasting a long eastern border on the Caspian Sea, situated in the southern Caucasus mountains, Azerbaijan sits squarely on the fault-line of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, with a population of some 9 million. Before 1991, however, Azerbaijan existed as an independent nation for a mere 23 months, club-sandwiched by a troika of Turks to its west, Iranians to its south and Russia to its north. Under Russian rule since the 19th century, Azerbaijan suffered much of the instability of its northern neighbour in the early 20th century – the 1905 Revolution, World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 – but also the short lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918-1920 as well as the Bolshevik invasion of Baku in 1921. This period of furious upheaval in the Caucasus resulted, as it did throughout the Russian Empire, in an equally frenzied creative intensity, especially in regards to the printed word.

The subject matter of *Molla Nasreddin* remains as relevant today as the conditions and context surrounding the publication. Debates about press freedoms continue to grip the world and the former Soviet sphere has a particularly embarrassing record of protecting the people who cover the news. *MN* was not an underground publication or 'samizdat' but an official magazine, published with the license and approval of the Russian authorities. To publish such stridently anti-clerical material, in a Muslim country, in the early 20th century, was done at no small risk to the editorial team. Members of *MN* were often harassed, their offices attacked, and on more than one occasion, Mammadguluzadeh had to seek asylum from protestors incensed by the contents of the magazine. A century later, with Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* or the Danish cartoons of the Prophet, we have ample evidence of the dangers inherent to demonstrating the limits to freedom of speech and the collateral damage, both individual and societal, that results from it. Notwithstanding its squarely leftist leanings, *Molla Nasreddin* embodies, one could say, today's somewhat tired capitalist mantra that competition is good for business: satirical publications in the Muslim world abounded both before and after the weekly's appearance on the scene, especially following the Tsar's decree of 17 October 1905 which allowed more press freedoms.[4] Of note were the pan-Turkic *Füyüzat,* the Persian-language *Haqayeq*, or the pro-Ottoman *Tazə Hayat*, financed by philanthropist Zeynalabdin Taghiyev who appears in several caricatures of this volume. But none were comparable either in influence, circulation or geographic reach to *Molla Nasreddin*.

4. Alexandre Bennigsen, 'Molla Nasreddin et la presse satirique musulmane de Russie avant 1917,' *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 3:3 (1962).

Even though the publication acted as a rallying cry of sorts for the nascent Azeri nation, *Molla Nasreddin*'s non-conformism and independence were to some degree a result of the city where it was first published: Tbilisi, the present day capital of neighbouring Georgia. When Mammadguluzadeh received an official permit to publish the weekly, Tbilisi was the capital of Transcaucasia, a region whose beautifully contrived name belies its contemporary viability. Comprising present day Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Transcaucasia was a hotbed of liberalism: from all stripes of socialists to young aristocrats à la Decembrists sympathetic to their cause, *narodniks*, and followers of different sects. Throughout the 19th century, writers, activists, and other individuals deemed a threat to the Empire were exiled to the Caucasus, which became known as the 'warm Siberia'. As the most cosmopolitan city of the region, Tbilisi was thoroughly polyglot, with a significant Muslim population which looked spiritually to Iran, linguistically to Turkey and politically to Moscow. The tumult following the Russian Revolution forced *Molla Nasreddin* to shut its doors temporarily: after the first eleven years in Tbilisi (1906-1917), Mammadguluzadeh moved the magazine's editorial teams and print house to Tabriz in northern Iran for a year in 1921 before settling down in Baku (1922-1931).

## 'IF MAMMADGULUZADEH WAS THE BRAIN OF THE PUBLICATION, SABIR WAS THE HEART AND SOUL.' [5]

5. Mirahmedov, op cit.

*Molla Nasreddin* brought together a dream-team of local luminaries. A tireless champion of secular Western values, Mammadguluzadeh was joined by Mirza Alekper Sabir (1862-1911), a satirist and poet who worked under the charming pseudonym 'Hop Hop', the illustrator Oskar Ivanovich Schmerling (1863-1938) who was Director of Tbilisi's School of Drawing and Sculpture along with his colleagues Josef Rotter and Azim Azimzadeh whose caricatures made *Molla Nasreddin* a cult favourite. Ethnic Germans not very familiar with the customs



and mores of the local populations, Schmerling and Rotter undertook extensive research trips around the Caucasus and northern Iran to better understand the region and its people.

Along with Mammadguluzadeh, a leading figure of Azeri realism, Mirza Alakbar Sabir published his most important work in the pages of *Molla Nasreddin*. His sharp tongue and prolific output brought him popularity far beyond anyone else involved in the weekly. From memos to essays, announcements to poems, Sabir's contribution to the periodical was so great that a whole school of Molla Nasreddinists debate who was the real editor-in-chief or visionary of the weekly.[6]

Exceptional talent is a double-edged sword when it speaks truth to power, as in Sabir's case, and the conservative establishment reminded him of this maxim until his deathbed. Born Alakbar Zeynalabdin oglu Tahirzadeh, Sabir itself was a nickname (meaning 'patience') as were some 50 odd pseudonyms (Hop-Hop, Mirat, Fasil) he used to protect his identity. Dogged by a life of poverty, Sabir was a wordsmith to the very end. Even his dying quip was full of gallows humour: 'I laid my flesh down for my people. But if God would give me more time, I would lay my bones down too'.[7]

The diversity and agility of the editorial team was naturally reflected within the pages of the weekly itself. Apart from an illustration always donning the cover, content ranged from dialogues to jokes, feuilletons over several issues, verse, humorous telegrams, anecdotes, official as well as satirical announcements (classifieds) and a rather conceptual dictionary section where heavy-handed terms and concepts (usually in Arabic and from the Qur'an) were re-defined according to lighter, more colloquial use. To paraphrase Georges Bataille, the founder of the avant-garde surrealist review *Documents* published around the same time, words were not defined according to their meaning, but their job or mission.[8]

6. Evan Siegel discusses the eulogies heaped on Sabir in his 'Molla Nasr od-Din and the Iranian Constitutionalist Press': 'Recalling Napoleon Bonaparte's famous declaration to Chateaubriand, that one of his writings had done more than an army, he added, "I say that Saber Effendi's works, too, have done more than an army during these five years of Iran's constitutionalism."'

7. In a rather disheartening coda to Sabir and Mammadguluzadeh's relationship, when the Soviet authorities decided to erect a monument to Sabir in Baku, they did not invite Mammadguluzadeh to its unveiling, because he had fallen out of favour with the authorities towards the end of MN's run. Timur Kerimli, ed., *Molla Nəsrəddin*, (Baku: Çinar-Çap Naşriyyatı, 2006).

8. *Molla Nasreddin's* dictionary acts almost as the inverse of Documents': if Mammadguluzadeh wanted to highlight the popular and common appropriation of lofty terms, Bataille sought the reverse: the affective, anthropological, if not esoteric meaning embedded within everyday words such as 'spit' or 'riding coat'.

## AN UNLIKELY SOURCE OF FEMINISM

Of the recurring themes in Molla Nasreddin, two in particular set the weekly apart from the number of satirical publications of the early 20th century: the advocation of women's rights and the Azeri elite's snobbery vis-à-vis its own culture. Women's rights often act as a prism through which most other issues are addressed. Several illustrations stress the need for women's education and point to Armenian literacy and modern educational system as the example to follow, a particularly potent counterpoint given the historic enmity between the Azeris and Armenians, who represented the most visible Christian population. Much like the advocation of women's rights, the use of Armenian examples allowed the weekly to further criticise the hypocrisy and fanaticism of the Muslim clerics and the traditional machismo of Caucasian societies.

In its fight for equal rights for women, *MN* rails against the oppressive effects of polygamy, pokes fun at parents' preference for a son over a daughter and exposes the double standard of Azeri men towards Azeri women. Azeri Muslims who insist on piety for their female counterparts have no issue frolicking with European women when travelling. One cover illustration even depicts men drafting a letter to the local governor requesting for a public brothel. *Molla Nasreddin*'s proto-feminism takes place against a rather unexpected backdrop of similar initiatives in Azerbaijan and the greater region. Along with Crimean Tatar Ismail Gasprinsky (1851 – 1914) and his journal *Tercüman*, Mammadguluzadeh

and *Molla Nasreddin* were key figures in the Jadid (meaning 'new' in Arabic) movement: Muslim reformers in late 19th century Russia whose progressive educational reforms ranged from the tactical (introduction of benches, desks, maps into classrooms) to the more strategic (opening of girls' schools, new textbooks). These reforms culminated in the brief but euphoric respite of Azerbaijan's short stint of independence – as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918-1920 – when suffrage was extended to women for the first time in any Muslim nation. To this day, Azeris take pride in granting women the right to vote well before such countries as the US (1920) or UK (1928).

### DRAFTING AN AZERI IDENTITY

If today, from the perch of the early 21st century, nationalism has a reactionary ring, implying certain excesses (in the Azeri case, for example, that of anti-Armenian sentiment), a century ago it allowed certain countries with uncertain pasts and even less certain futures to carve out a national identity thus far ignored, suppressed or simply forgotten. Azerbaijan's precarious geopolitical stature was not for wont of such nationalists, the most prominent being perhaps Mammad Emin Resulzade (1884-1955), the scholar and political leader of the short-lived Azerbaijan Republic. To be clear, the ultimate objective was Azeri independence; but as *Molla Nasreddin* demonstrates, one must learn to crawl before learning to walk. In this particular case: the assessment and appreciation of Azeri culture in its own right and on equal footing with the cultures of the far larger nation-states surrounding it (Russia, Iran, Turkey).

Illustrations, announcements and mock telegrams parody the European clothes that the Azeri elite wear, often taking aim at the self-styled intellectuals who went to great lengths to differentiate themselves from their more common compatriots. Whether they lived in Moscow, Tbilisi or Baku, the Azeri elite read, wrote and spoke amongst themselves in Russian. Russian was considered literary, elegant and edifying whereas Azeri (called Turk) was understood as vulgar and unbecoming of an educated individual. If self-colonisation features as one of *MN's* many bêtes noires, the choice to publish in Azeri Turk and not Russian or even Istanbulli (Turkish) provided the best opportunity to slay the beast.[9] *Molla Nasreddin* shows its non-conformist, mercilessly independent streak and kills two birds with one stone: advocating the need for a viable Azeri intellectual culture while criticising the Azeri people for not understanding this very need.

9. The decision to publish in Azeri Turkish became the subject of not only intense interest but also rivalry between Mammadguluzadeh and Ali-Bey Huseinzadeh, editor of *Hayat* and *Füyüzat*, who claimed there was no such thing as a separate Azeri language. 'The Azeri language is simple peoples' language. The language of shepherds. And the language of the cradle. Literary language should be Istanbulli.' Kerimli, op cit.

### THE WISE FOOL AND THE ALPHABET THAT FOOLS AROUND

It was via the complete re-edition of *Molla Nasreddin* that we fell in love with the devastating tides of change which washed over the Azeri alphabet. With three shifts in less than 70 years – from Arabic to Latin in 1929, Latin to Cyrillic in 1939 and Cyrllic back to Latin in 1991 – the history of the Azeri alphabet has polyglots around the world stumped as to whether one should blush, laugh or cry. On the pages of *MN*, one comes across all three scripts, bringing its own distinctive set of hurdles to the task of translation. It is one thing to find a translator for a language spoken by four million people, but another thing entirely for that translator to also know the two previous iterations or scripts of his or her own language. These problems, alas, pale in comparison to the tragic loss such ruptures in linguistic



continuity cause for generations of Azeris, past, present and future. The changes in the alphabet essentially made Azeris immigrants in their own country, both across generations – grandparents couldn't read the language their grandchildren were taught in school – as well as vis-à-vis their own cultural legacy. After the 1929 diktat requiring Latinisation, books in Arabic were summarily destroyed, resulting in the disappearance of many texts , including an important body of work in Islamic natural medicine.

Prominent intellectuals dating back to the 19th century such as Fathali Akhundov (1812-1878) advocated Latinising the Azeri alphabet: the standard Arabic script's three vowels would not suffice to convey the nine vowels of Azeri.[10] Many, such as *Molla Nasreddin*, saw in the Arabic script (which arrived with the Islamic conquest) the seeds of the Muslim world's lagging behind the West.

10. For the centennial anniversary of Akhundov's birth, *MN* ran a commemorative portrait on its cover, see Issue 42, 27 November 1911 (page 94 of this volume).

### A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAN

Within a month of *Molla Nasreddin*'s launch, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh boasts 'more than half of our readers are Iranians. Starting from Khorassan thru Tehran, Esfahan, Tabriz as well as several villages. In these places there are more than 15,000 copies of *Molla Nasreddin*. From these, 12,690 are yearly subscriptions. The others are sold in retail'. With every notable event in Iran being featured in some capacity in the weekly, Iran was arguably the country where the magazine had its largest impact. The Qajar dynasty was in steep decline as were Iran's coffers, with crippling debts to foreign powers, in particular the British and Russians. Because of its relentless focus on the Iranian rulers' inefficacy and corruption, *MN*'s essays and illustrations acted as a preamble of sorts to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1910 which resulted in the establishment of the first parliament in all of Asia.

During its most prolific period, from 1906 to 1917 when it was based in Tbilisi, *MN*'s base outside Persia provided a unique amnesty, no matter how chaotic or numerous the pressures domestically, from the scrutiny and potential censure of the Persian monarchy. On several occasions, the Iranians protested to their Russian counterparts, both during the Tsar's time as well as when Azerbaijan was under Soviet rule, about offensive content in the pages of *MN*. On one particular occasion, Georgy Chicherin (1872-1936), the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, complained that *Molla Nasreddin* was ruining the Soviet Union's relationship with Iran. In a rare example of protest to central authority that would sadly be absent from 1929 onwards (due to Stalin's ascent to power), the Azeri Commissar Ruholla Akhundov retorted: 'I would like to express my surprise at Chicherin's estimation of *Molla Nasreddin*. From its very launch, *Molla Nasreddin* fought against absolutism in Iran. And now when there are rare occasions for articles against the unjust behaviour of Iranian feudals, Camrade Checherin says these articles can ruin our relationship with Iran. This is inadmissible. This is unfair'.

Regardless of their influence across the border, the editorial staff remained highly suspicious of Iran and, as ardent champions of secularism, saw in Iran a backwards, traditional country and source of pernicious Shi'ite fundamentalism. Even the short-lived, relatively liberal reforms of the Constitutional Revolution fell short of *Molla Nasreddin*'s rather purist standards: the weekly objected to the religious zeal certain leaders of the Constitutional Revolution exploited to advance their cause.
After a three-year hiatus following the Russian Revolution, Mammadguluzadeh

married a wealthy widow and moved *MN*'s base to Tabriz, the capital of Iran's Azerbaijan province in the north west of the country. Despite the injection of new financial resources, the publication ran for only one troubled year in Tabriz due to local pressure and bad timing.[11] Making up more than 30% of Iran's present day population, Azeris have played an integral role throughout Iran's cultural, political and economic history. Perhaps because of the region's proximity to Russia, Iranian Azerbaijan has historically been the heart of most of Iran's leftist or progressive movements. Throughout the 20th century, from the Iranian Constitutional Revolution to the short-lived, Soviet-backed Autonomous Republic of Iranian Azerbaijan in 1946, Azeris in Iran have managed to balance an unlikely legacy of left-leaning politics with cultural independence and Iranian patriotism: an achievement which should make the editorial staff of *Molla Nasreddin* proud, despite their misgivings about the country.[12]

11. Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani (1880–1920), a conservative Iranian parlementarian, had just passed away shortly before Mammadguluzadeh's arrival in Tabriz. (See illustration p. 91 of this volume).

12. To wit: even Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the reformist candidate in the 2009 Iranian presidential election, hails from Iranian Azerbaijan.

### ALL GOOD PRESS MUST COME TO AN END…

By 1920, the Soviets had invaded Baku and Azerbaijan's short-lived independence came to an end. The quality of *Molla Nasreddin*'s editorial and art-direction suffered considerably as the periodical was forced to tow the Bolshevik party line. Moscow shoved editorial directives down Mammaguluzadeh's throat, destroying its independent streak and even going so far as to request the magazine change its name to *Allahsiz* (The Atheist). Only three issues of *Molla Nasreddin* came out in 1931 and shortly afterwards it shut its doors for good. Its impact, however, is difficult to over-estimate.

The journal offered inspiration to similar pamphleteers across the Muslim world – from the Balkans to Iran and Serbia. Just across the border in Iran, the magazine served as an inspiration to such seminal Iranian reformist publications as Rasht's *Nasim-e Shomal* and the progressive Tehran weekly *Sur-e-Esrafil,* both of which played an important role in galvanizing debate and opinion during the Constitutional Revolution. In the early days following the Russian Revolution, Jadidists across Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia found common cause with the Bolsheviks and managed to reform colonial educational policies across the region. The Azeri newspaper *Irshad* coined the term 'Molla Nasreddinism' to describe the ability to tell things as they are.

Thanks to the mixture of a strict autocracy and an oil windfall allowing the government to buy peoples' sympathy, Baku has managed to handle the major geopolitical issues of the 20th and early 21st century – Bolshevik Communism and revolutionary Islam, respectively – with relative success. It would be foolish to dismiss the relevance of the Caucasus today. The Great Game of the 19th century continues, simply with more players and wildly different, if more transparent, stakes: from the proxy wars between the US and Russia in neighbouring Georgia to the line of suitors (US, Russia, Turkey, China) vying for strategic access to the oil-rich Caspian, to name but a few. If we are to believe the faulty theory that the West and Islam are on a collision course, we would do well to look at the only precedent in history where both cultures co-existed, in the Caucasus and across Eurasia. Azerbaijan's progressive history and geographic position between Europe and Asia offer the potential for a truly revolutionary Islam where moderation, pluralism and politics are not mutually exclusive. No matter the magazine's sometimes excessively sharp tongue, the debates at the heart of *Molla Nasreddin* – Islam's confrontation with modernity, Imperial over-reach,



corruption, press freedoms – have only become more pressing and immediate over the last half century, be it in Alaska, Angola or Afghanistan.

Recently reissued in its entirety by the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, each volume of *Molla Nasreddin* runs roughly 700 pages, with a total of 8 imposing tomes in all. Since that blistering day several years ago, carrying and caring for these volumes between Brussels, Moscow, Paris, New York, Berlin and Warsaw has toned our muscles if not our thoughts. We have wrestled with *Molla Nasreddin*: like any object of intense interest, it both repels and attracts us. But it is rare to embrace one's antithesis, as we have with *MN*: spending years translating, funding and publishing a historical media platform with which we often disagree. Standing squarely as a champion of secular, Western values, the weekly is in some sense a mascot, in reverse, of our practice. Where *MN* is secular and pro-Western, we tend to err on the side of the mystical and remain suspicious of the wholesale import of Western modernity. But, like the best cultural productions, *Molla Nasreddin* is polyphonic, joyfully self-contradictory and staunchly in favour of the creolisation that results from multiple languages, ideas and identities.
The magazine's pan-Caucasian character (itinerant offices between Tbilisi, Baku and Tabriz), linguistic complexity (across three alphabets) and use of humour as a disarming critique make for an irresistible trifecta which, despite any partisan polemics, we celebrate unequivocally.

Slavs and Tatars
Moscow, January 2011

## ON TRANSLITERATION

A truly polyglot publication, *Molla Nasreddin* features, in addition to the mainstay of Azeri Turkish, no less than 4 other languages, including Russian, Persian (Farsi), Istanbulli Turkish and Arabic. Different languages require, of course, different scripts – a single page of the magazine might contain the Cyrillic, Latin and Arabic alphabets. So as to avoid wading any further into this transliterative tumult, we have chosen to adhere to the recent Azeri re-edition of the periodical as source text.

## ON TRANSLATION

All efforts have been made to faithfully translate the texts accompanying the illustrations in this volume. On certain occasions, the English caption does not correspond to the Azeri caption in the margin. This is because some illustrations feature more than one original caption – for example, Azeri and Russian, or Azeri and Persian – with entirely different content. For the sake of consistency, we have only included the Azeri caption and referred to both, when appropriate, for the English translation.

# EAST VS. WEST

**Though *Molla Nasreddin* was an ardent champion of the Azeri-Turkish language and Azeri national culture, it subscribed almost wholesale to the idea that progress meant Westernisation. Throughout its pages, traditions, religion, superstitions and the like were parodied while technology, secularism and modernisation went unscathed. One wonders what the editorial staff would make of the region today. Since the fall of communism a little more than two decades ago, countries across the former Soviet sphere have come to fulfil the decidedly pro-Western hopes of *Molla Nasreddin*, often to devastating effect. In an effort to sweep an uncomfortably painful history, under the proverbial Persian rug, regimes across the region have turned their backs on formerly reputable educational systems and placated traumatised populations with a panacea of consumerism, in a misguided effort to modernise. What it has produced instead is a disenchantment with democracy, entrenched autocratic regimes, and nascent Islamism where previously there was none.**



**A Western-styled Azeri stands cooly next to an Azeri in traditional garb on a hot summer afternoon.**




***"Whoa, it's hot!"***

*"Bah bah, nə istidi!"*



Böyüklərə itaət vacibdir.

**It is important to obey one's elders.**



*"Başina dönüm, Xanbacı, qoyma, bagrım yarıldı, bular necə insandı?"*

**The Azeri woman turns to another (in Azeri): *"Sister, what a horror! Who are these people?"* The European woman asks her husband (in Russian): *"Damn it! What is it with these monsters?"***






**Qulaq asınız:** ***"təzə oxuyanlar istəyirlər köhnə bütpərəst adətlərinizi içinizdən götürsünlər. Aman günüdür, qoymayınız, qardaşlar!..."***

***"Listen, people who get a contemporary education want us to forget our old, pagan beliefs. Do not allow this to happen under any circumstances!"***

According to an old Azeri superstition, it is considered good luck to pour water behind oneself when travelling. Here, three European women on the train platform find themselves on the receiving end of the spill.




Baki vağzalında

**Train Station in Baku**



Mocking the difference in living standards between Azeris and Russians, the illustration shows a kursu, a pre-industrial heating mechanism in which coal or wood is burned under a table where people sit. A blanket wrapped around the table keeps the heat inside, near feet and legs.



***"How do these poor Russians live without one?"***

*"Gorəsən bu yazıq urustar qışın bu soyuğunda kürsüsuz necə otüşürlər."*

Bespectacled and smoking, the donkeys are the rulers carried on the backs of the people.



**What we see everyday**

Hər gün gördüklərimiz

**A critique of the hypocritical approach of the educated class towards women: at home, women are obliged to cover themselves head to toe, while abroad they can dress like Europeans.**

**An educated Muslim with his wife in the Caucasus**






**An educated Muslim with his wife in Paris**

Müsəlman intiligenti və xanımı Qafqazda öz kəndində
Müsəlman intiligenti və xanımı Parijdə




*Körpü*

**Bridge**



**To the dismay of his younger brother, the elder brother walks into public with a pitcher used to wash one's behind in the toilet.**




*"Dadaş, burada eşiyə çıxmaq olmaz, arvad-uşaq var ayıbdı."*
*"Cəhənnəmə ayibdi, gora ayıbdı: Görüllər kişi var, itilib qoyub getsinlər."*

**Younger brother:** ***"Please, you can't walk out like this. There are women here!"*** **Elder brother:** ***"To hell with them! Can't they see there are men here? Let them get out of the way…"***

With bicycles, cars, bridges and buildings, the world of the devil is modern and developed. The world of believers is full of ethereal illusions and idleness.

According to the book, the world of the devil



According to the book, the world of believers

*"Hilyətüş-şəyatin"* kitabından
*"Hilyətül-muttəqin"* kitabından

**According to an old superstition, every time an owl cries, someone dies.**




*"…Ay allah, bu bayquş genə görəsən niyə banmıyır, allah, sən bizi bunun bəlasından saxla…"*

***"Oh dear God, it's strange…why is the owl making those noises? Let Allah save us from unhappiness…"***



**The woman attempts in vain to keep her husband indoors by invoking the curse of the evil eye.**




*"A kişi, aman günüdü getmə bir yana, sənə göz vurallar."*

***"Don't go out that door! Someone could wink at you."***

**A woman recites a superstitious proverb as she passes the young boy through 'oud,' – incense commonly used when greeting guests or protecting people from harm and illness.**




*"Üzərliksən həvasən, həzar dərdə dəvasən."*

***"You are as necessary as air, and protected against 100 illnesses."***

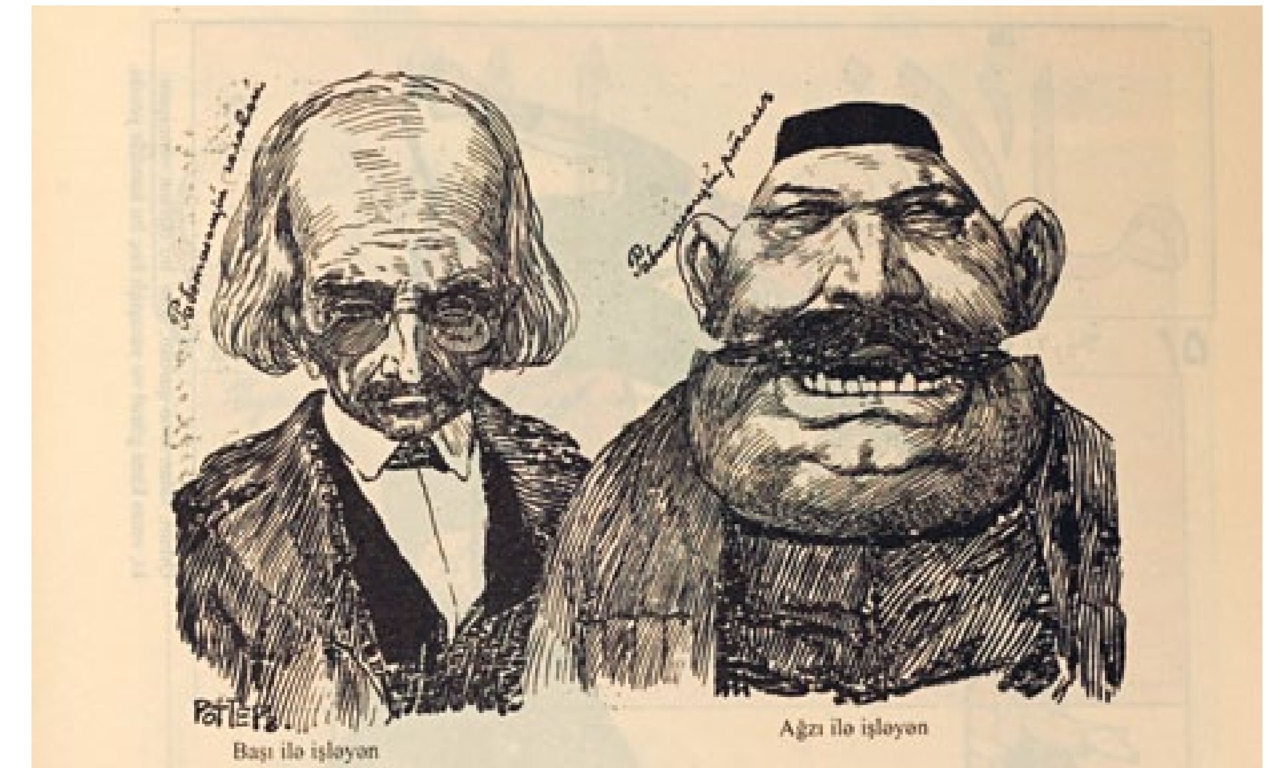




***"Europeans take pride in their aircraft. But they should come take a look at ours instead."***

*"Avropalılar öz icad etdikləri hava gəmilərinə fəxr edirlər, amma bir gəlib bizim də hava gəmimizə tamaşa etsinlər."*

**A critique of both the Muslim man, right, who speaks but does not think and the European man, left, who thinks but does not speak.**




**Doctor's advice: that part of the body which works the most grows the most. Left, working with the head; right, working with the mouth.**

Başı ilə işləyən / Ağzı ilə işləyən
Bədənin hansı üzvü çox işləsə–böyüyür və qüvvət tapır. (Həkim nəsihəti)

On the train to Khorasan, top, a province of Iran, passengers sit in silence while on the train to the university, bottom (likely St. Petersburg), girls and boys sit next to each other and read.







Bu günlər dəmir yollarda minik əlindən yer yoxdur.

**In these days, there are no available train wagons.**



The traditional religious classes try to scale the wall the old-fashioned way, left, whereas the secular reformers manage to effortlessly approach European culture (lady, center) through learning, right.



# CLASS

The revolutionary zeal that gripped Russia in the early 20th century finds its way into the pages of *Molla Nasreddin* as well. Not exactly an advocate of class war or violence, *MN* takes a decidedly subtle view, its illustrations saturated with macabre humour criticising the extreme disparities in wealth between haves and have-nots. The magazine's home for the first eleven years of operation, Tbilisi, had been a refuge for liberal exiles from across Imperial Russia; while Baku, where it spent its last nine, was the producer of half the world's oil until the Second World War and thus a city of astronomical wealth and astounding poverty.



**The bags are labelled 'wheat' and 'grain' in this drawing, one of several in the magazine, addressing the inequality between landlords and peasants.**




**Landlords and Peasants**

Mulkədar və rəiyyət

**The beggars ask philanthropist Haji Zeinalabdin Tagiev for money. While his leg is only marked 'millionaire', it is clear from his face that it is the famous Azeri philanthropist who is the target of caricature. Perhaps the hindsight of history has weighed against Molla Nasreddin and in favor of Tagiev, as his contributions to Azeri culture now appear particularly significant, especially when compared to the Bolshevik period that followed.**




*"Vallah, balalarım, heç zadım yoxdur sizə verim, mən özüm də acımdan ölürəm…"*

***"In the name of God, my children, I don't have anything left and am hungry myself."***



**Representing different governments (as can be gleaned from the various hats crowning their heads), the wolves grill the people – farmers, soldiers, etc. – on skewers, in traditional Caucasian shashlik kebab style.**



*Qonaqlıq*

**Entertainment: a Friday roast**

**A famine in the Zangezur and Karabagh regions at the turn of the 20th century**



*"Ağalar, allah xatirinə, elə bilin biz də heyvanıq, bizə də arpa verin yeyək."*

***"Dear sir, we are also animals, so please be so kind as to give us some oat as well!"***

Zangezur is in present day Armenia and Karabagh is part of Nagorno-Karabagh, a region long contested by Armenia and Azerbaijan. At the turn of the 20th century, both regions were known for their large numbers of destitute Azeri and Kurdish residents. Here, a well-to-do Azeri family, eating and drinking leisurely outside, scolds the beggars from the provinces.



Qarabağ və Zəngəzur acları. Səxavətli ağalar.

**The hungry from Karabagh and Zangezur, left, and generous gentlemen, right**

In another illustration entitled 'Landlords and Peasants', the hoarded bags are labelled 'wheat' and 'grain'.



Mulkədar və rəiyyət

***"I am a gold-beater and my wages from my craft / Are nothing but screaming and yelling. I am always sitting among gold, / But I never get a share of it."***



Azeri journalists discuss the story of 70-year-old Azeri philanthropist Tagiev's marriage to a 14-year-old girl. After it was discovered that his new wife was having an affair with one of his employees, an engineer named of Beibutov, the latter was found dead.



28 şəban 1329 Altıncı il 11 августа 1911 г.

ملا نصرالدين

№29 Qiymәti 12 qәpik. МОЛЛА НАСРЕДДИНЪ Цена 12 k. № 29

*Bakıda müsəlman qəzetələri*

Litoq. S.Bıxova.

*«Qəzet millət üçün bir aynadır ki, oraya baxan hər bir şeyi görə bilər, bircə Hacı cənablarının evində injener Behbudovun döyülməyindən savayı». Atalar sözü: «Güclü adamı incitmək ağıllıların işi deyil».*

Qəzət millət üçün bir aynadır ki, oraya baxan hər bir şeyi görə bilər, bircə Hacı cenablarının evində injener Behbudovun döyülməyindən savayı Atalar sözü: *"Güclü adamı incitmək ağıllıların işi deyil."*

**Newspapers are mirrors into which people look and see everything. But the one thing they can't see is how engineer Beibutov was killed in Haji Tagiev's house. *"The smart one does not taunt the strong one."***

**A strongman stands in front of the oil workers and boasts:**
***"No one is able to beat me and yet, no one hires me."***

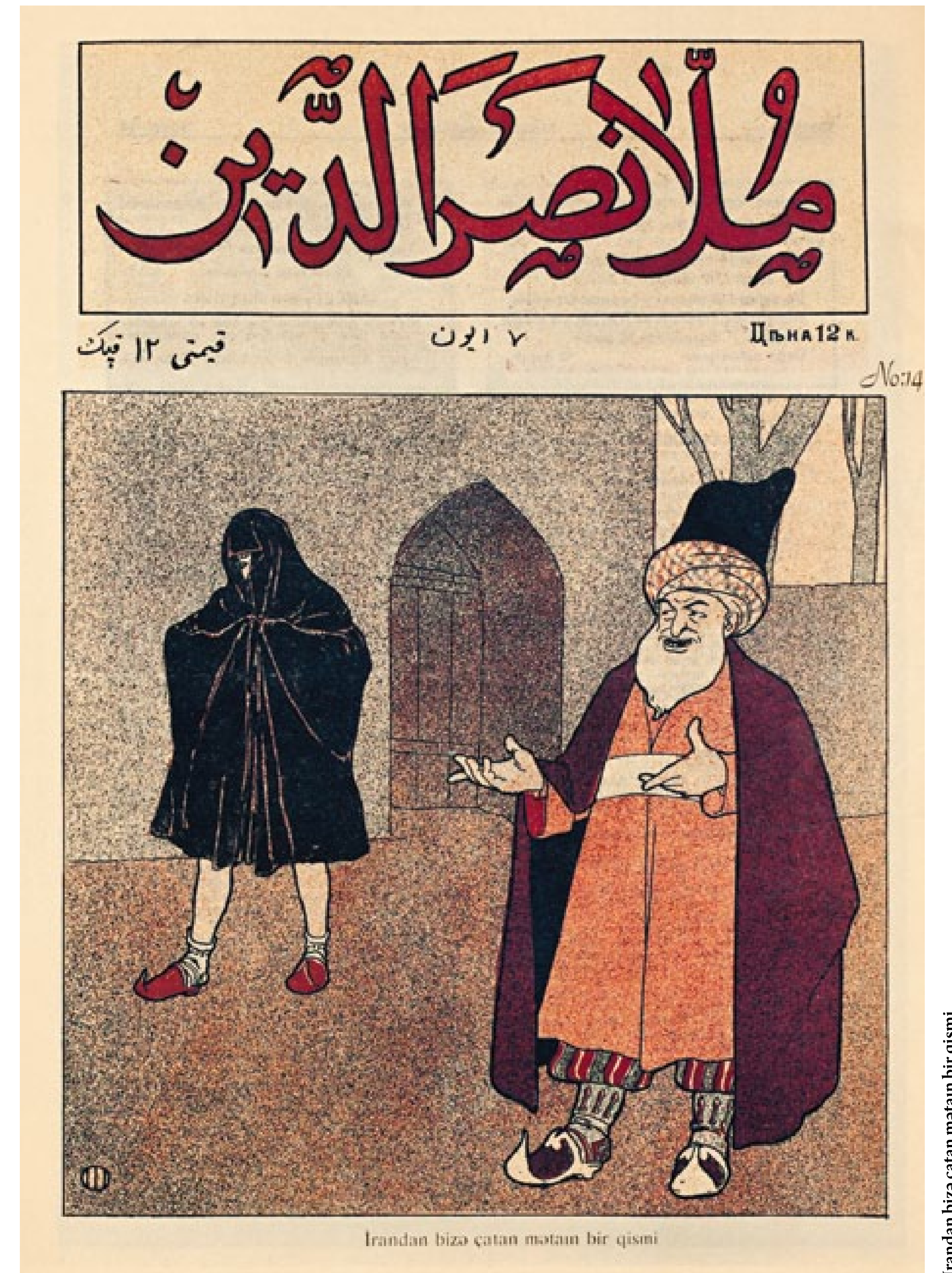
**The boss answers, in Russian, *"It doesn't matter, there isn't any work anyhow."***

Pəhləvan: *"Bu vaxtadək arxam yer görməyib, mənim kimi pəhləvana bu zalım oğlu iş vermir…"* Mə"dən müdiri: *"Vsyo ravno, raboti net."* (Bakıda neft mə"dənində işsiz fəhlələr)

# WOMEN

*Molla Nasreddin's* advocacy of women's rights was perhaps its most sizeable achievement. One does not expect the Caucasus, known for its firebrand machismo and elephant's memory, to be a pioneer in such affairs. Yet, it was here, in the fleeting Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, that suffrage was extended to all women; the first of any Muslim nation and ahead of places typically associated with the suffragette movement such as the US or UK. On the issue of women, the magazine was relentless, in scope as well as in scale: articles, illustrations and blurbs addressing the oppression of women outnumber all other topics by a significant margin and touch upon issues of religion, reform, education and colonialism.






What some of us receive from Iran …

Irandan bizə çatan mətaın bir qismi.

**The illustration caricatures the lack of education for women in traditional Muslim societies. One wonders what the editors would make of post-revolutionary Iran, where, despite stark inequalities in rights, women make up the majority of university students.**




***"Honey, take a good look at your teacher and then take a look at me. Now tell me, who looks more like a lady!"***

*"Yazıq qızım, bir uçitelüvə də bax, mənə bax, gör hankımız xanıma oxşuruyuq!..."*



**A spiritual leader sits with his two wives, guarding large bags marked 'zeikiat' or donations that he is hoarding at the house instead of distributing to the poor and needy.**



**While the 12-year-old Muslim girl is married off to an older man, left, the 12-year-old Jewish girl attends school.**




**A Muslim girl and a 12-year-old Jewish girl**

**İsəlman qızı / 12 yaşında yəhudi qızı**



Ərə gedəndən sonar…

**After lessons**





Dərs qurtaranda

**After marriage**




***"Ah, you d••• kid, are you blind or what? You broke the glass…"***

**Ana:** *"Ay donuz oğlu, kordu gözün, stəkanı sındırdın?"*



***"Son, hit your mom and I will admire you."***

**Ata:** *"Anana bir vur görüm, mənim qoçaq balam! Vur sənin…ni yeyim, vur…"*





***"Mama, give me some candy or else I will tell Papa that you looked out onto the street!"***

*"Ana, vallah, mənə pul verməsən qənfet alım, dədəm gələndə deyəcəyəm ki, anam akuşkadan küçəyə baxırdı."*

**According to the tradition of arranged marriages, it is only on the day of the wedding that the husband first meets his wife. The fall of the Soviet Union in the late 20th century and the rise of the internet have allowed for a not-altogether different situation with the mail-order bride.**




*"What a beautiful girl, I will ask Aunt Fatima to reserve her for me."*

*"Vay dədəm? Bu mən görən qız deyil…"*






*"Oh the horror! This is not the woman I saw!"*

*"Gözəl qızdır, Fatma xalanı göndərim, bu qızı alsın mənə!"*




Four wives should be enough…

Dörd dənə kifayətdir.





A son is born.

Arvad oğlan doğdu.



A daughter is born.

Arvad qız doğdu.

**This drawing was made before the rise of consumer culture and retail therapy as many men in the Middle East can attest to.**



Kişinin bir eşşəyi olmaqdansa, bir-iki arvadı olmaq yaxşıdır, çünki həm ucuz, həm xeyirlidir.

**It's cheaper and more useful for a man to have two wives than one donkey.**

**The women look with envy to the prison, left, because it at least has windows, unlike their own homes, right, labelled 'Home of Muslim Women'.**



*"Xanbaci, adamın belə akoşkalı evi ola, hərdənbir ürəyi sıxılanda otura akoşkanın qabağında küçəyə baxa..."*

***"Sister, look how lucky they are: they have windows!"***






Əbdülrəşid: *"Xanım, nə qədər tərəqqi eləsəniz – bu üzü açıq gəzməklə müsəlmanlara çata bilməyəcəksiniz"* (Molla və Yaponiya xanımı)

**Abdul Rashid:** ***"Dear lady, regardless how much progress you've made, as long as your face is not covered, you cannot compare with Muslim women."***

**The illustration addresses the issue of the hejab: contrasting the woman's strict adherence to dress code when faced with a doctor and liberal approach when faced with a cleric.**




Hicab məsələsənə dair: *"Ay arvad, aç üzünü, həkim boğazına baxsın" "Yox, yox, olsəm də açmanam."*

**Husband (to his wife):** ***"Uncover your face so the doctor can examine your throat."*** **Wife:** ***"Absolutely not, I won't uncover it for anything."***





*"Qoy molla göbəyimi yazsın, bunun zərəri yoxdur."*

**Wife:** ***"Let the mollah write a prayer around my belly button. It can't do any harm."***

**The scene takes place in Yerevan, where the driver is scolded for presuming that the women travelling with the man are his daughters.**




*Faytonçu: "A bəy bu qızların ikisi də sizin qızınızdır?"*
*Intelligent: "Kəs səsini axmaq oğlu axmaq! Görmürsən ki, biri arvadımdı, biri də baldızımdı?"*

**Carriage driver:** ***"Sir, are these girls your daughters?"***
**Gentleman:** ***Shut up, idiot. Don't you know, that one is my wife?***

**The Muslim women watch in horror as the teacher writes down lessons for their children.**



*"A qız, a qız! Buna bax, bu arvad kişi kimi yazı yazır."*

***"Look sister, she can write like a man!"***

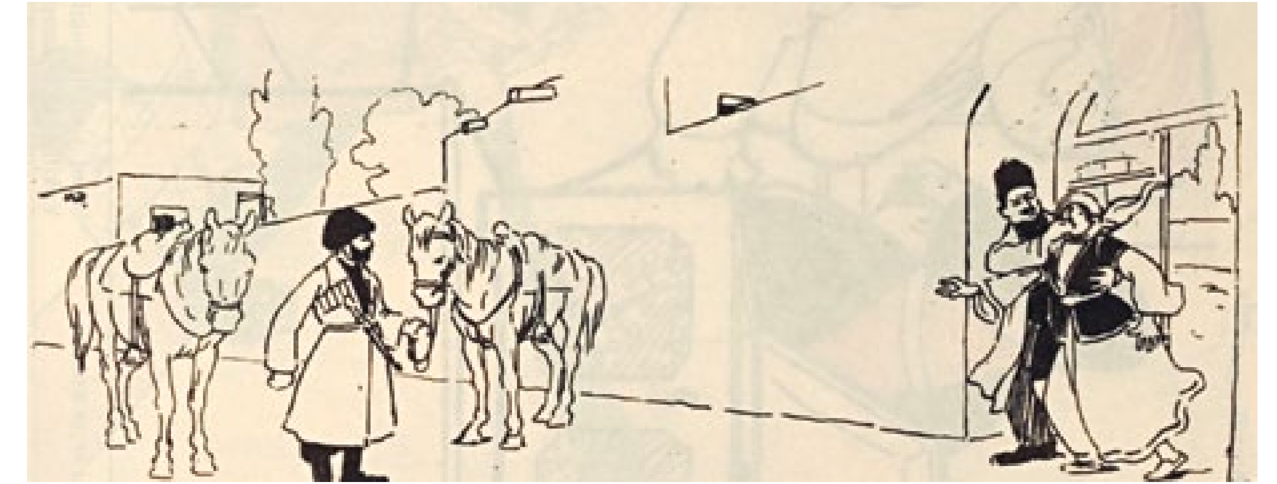


**If a man loves a woman but doesn't come from the right family or can't afford the dowry, he can choose to kidnap the bride, the consummate chivalric choice. An urgent and dramatic take on the surprise elopement, kidnapping the bride avoids the prohibitive expenses of weddings and bridal fees. A Caucasian tradition, kidnapping is the nuclear option of love, as it were. Sweep the target off her feet with such strength as to divorce her from everything else in life. If all goes well, lie low for a while, use the time to cultivate mutual affections, and return to reality (to the village, and society) as husband and wife.**



Dünən: Oğlan qızı yalvarıb istiyir ata-anası vermir.

**Yesterday: He makes a proposal, but neither she nor her parents are willing to even hear of it.**



Bu gün: Oğlan qızı götürüb qaçır.

**Today: He forcefully takes her.**



Sabah: Ata-anası oğlan yalvarır ki, tez kəbin kədirsin.

**Tomorrow: The parents beg him to have mercy and marry her.**

**In the top image, several traditional wedding rituals are observed: from the sacrifice of a lamb in the background to the young boy holding a mirror towards the bride as a sign of sacrifice.**



Təzə gəlinə ehtiram.

**Paying respects to the new bride**



Gəlinə ehtiram (Bir aydan sonra).

**Paying respects to the bride after one month**





Əvvəl belə olur.

**In the beginning, it starts out this way…**



Axırda da belə olur.

**… and ends this way.**

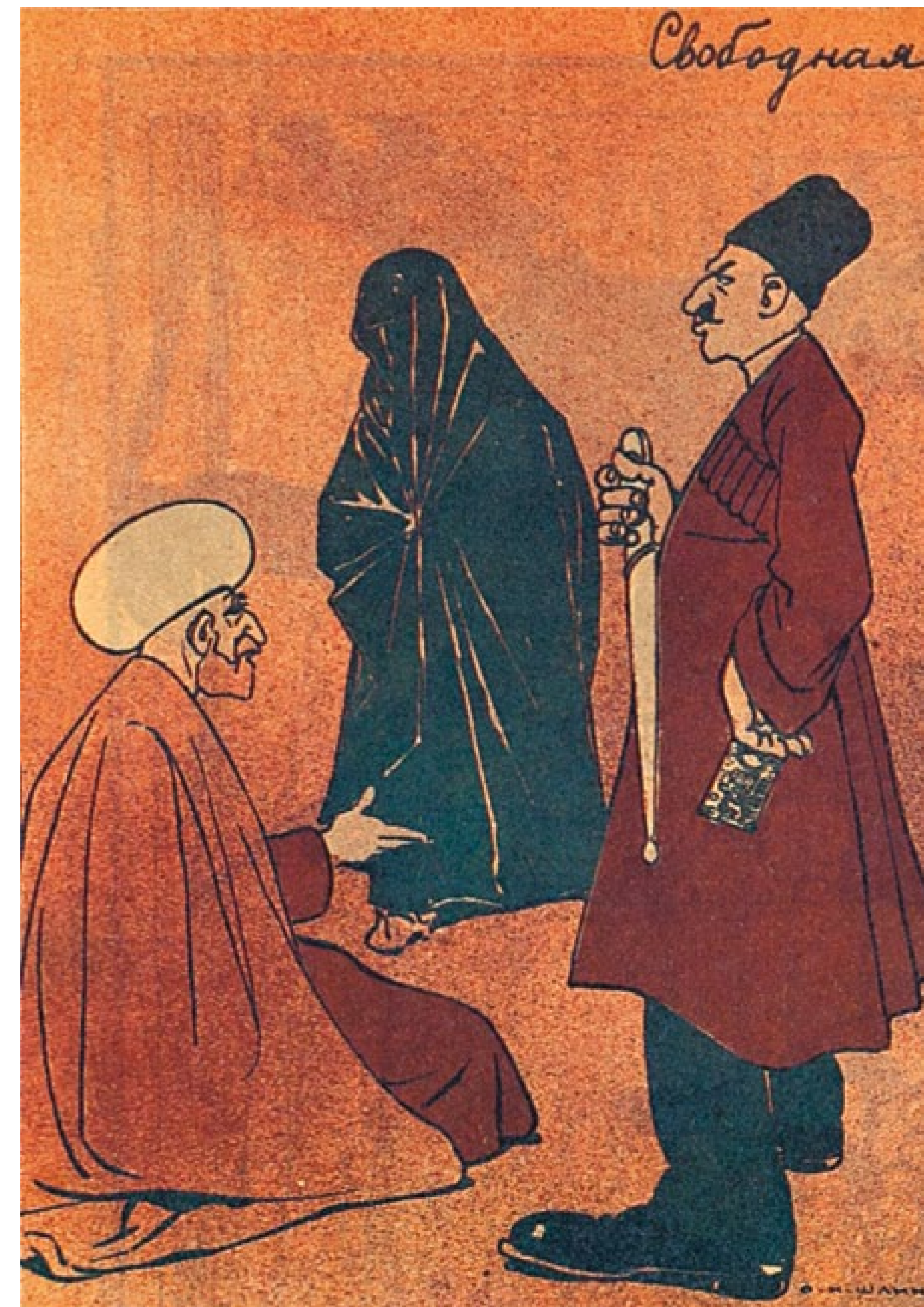
**The illustration, titled 'Free Love', parodies the lack of choice facing young women when it comes to the question of marriage.**




*"Ox xoşuna gəlməzsən, zornan aparram."*

***"If you don't want to go, I will force you."***





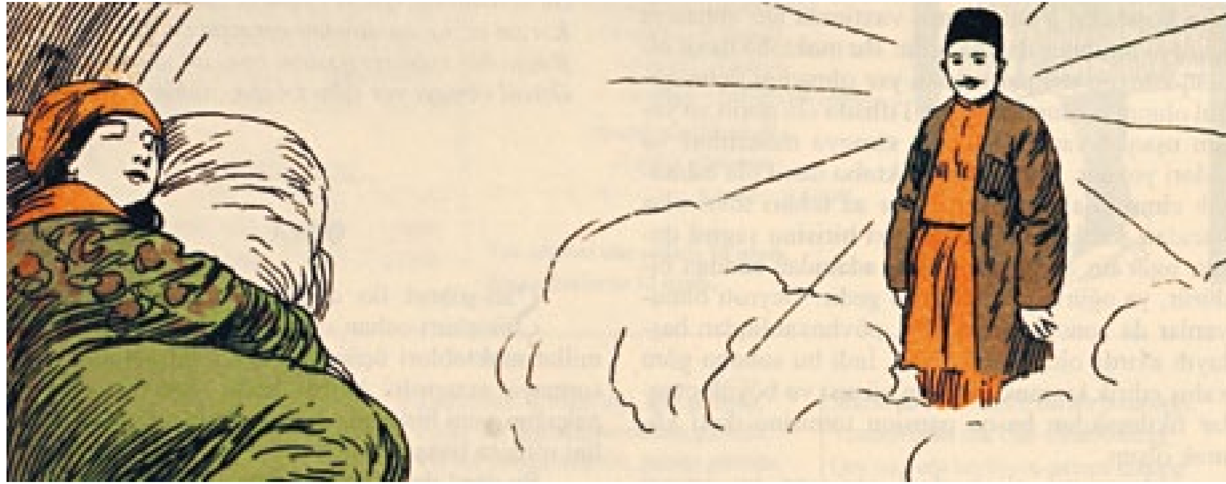

*Axund: "A qız səsin ki çıxmır, görünür razısan. Allahın əmri ilə səni bu oğlana nikah elədim."*

***"Girl, since you are silent, I see you agree. With God's permission, then, I offer you to this man."***



**Mohammad:** ***"By the will of Allah, I want you to give your daughter to my son, Timur."***

Məhəmməd: *"Allahın əmrilə qızını oğlum Teymura istəyirəm."* *"Yox, yox, olsəm də açmanam."*



**The day before meeting him, the girl imagines what he looks like.**

Qızın zifafdan bir gecə əvvəlki yuxusu
*"Yox, yox, olsəm də açmanam."*



**(at their first meeting)** ***"Don't go thinking I am old, my dear."***

*"Qadan alım, məni qoca güman eləmə!..."*
(zifaf gecəsi)






***"Look, Papa, these cages are bigger than mine. There must be large animals in there."***
***"Shhhh, my son, this is a house of free Turkish women."***

Oğul: *"Baba! Bax gör qəfəzlər mənimkindən necə böyükdür! Oradakı heyvanlar çox ucadırmı?"* Baba: *"Sus,! Bala, sus! Orası həp Osmanlı xanımlarının dairələridir."*




*"Köpək qızı bu saat gönünü soyaram…"*

***"Damn girl, I will rip your skin off!"*** **(with his Muslim wife)**






*"Bağışla xanım bir qələtdi eləmişəm…"*

***"I am sorry, honey, it's all my fault."*** **(with his Russian lover)**

# COLONIALISM

Despite its decidedly Western stance on issues such as women's rights, religion, and education, *Molla Nasreddin* lambasted the European colonial powers and took an ambitious swipe at their meddling across the globe, from the Middle East to the Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire to the Far East. The magazine's critique of colonialism at times coincided with a defence of national identity: including the advocacy of Azeri Turkish and condemnation of the Azeri inferiority complex with regard to Russia. Of particular interest is the way in which Russia is depicted. As an officially sanctioned publication of the Russian Empire (during its most prolific period, 1906-1917), *Molla Nasreddin* had to be clever in its criticism of Russian imperialism in the region, otherwise it risked the wrath of the censors or having its license revoked. Often its critique of Russian policies in the Caucasus are found couched in more general themes, say the clash of cultures between East and West, or in allegory: across the many illustrations featuring animals, the bear is the only animal left unnamed. Hint, hint.



**An Englishman tips the scales to the right towards France (2 pounds), Russia (2 pounds), and Iran (1 pound). On the left side of the balance are Italy (4 pounds), Germany (4 pounds), Austria (3 pounds) and Turkey (2 pounds).**




**The weight of various nations**

Dövlətlərin müvazinəsi

Great Britain, Germany, France (labelled 'The Great Powers') feed the Aegean islands to a bloated Greece as the Ottoman Empire, right, objects helplessly. Following World War I, the European Entente Powers attempt to carve up the Ottoman Empire amongst themselves.




**On the question of reuniting the Aegean islands with Greece.**
***"Oh God! What oppression to witness with my own eyes my island being taken from me and swallowed by my enemy!"***

*"Pərvərdigara belə də zülm olar ki, gözüm baxa-baxa cəzirələrimi əlimdən alıb düşmənimə uddursunlar..."*



Right: Bulgaria and Romania get independence, Germany gets the railway in Baghdad, Italy gets Albania, Bosnia-Hercegovina goes to Austria. Left: Russia receives the Bosphorous and Dardenelles, Great Britain gets Egypt, France gets privileges, Greece gets Crete.




**The Turkish question and the balance of power in Europe**

Türkiyə məsələsi və Yevropa müvazinesi

The trap is labelled 'the game in Eastern Europe and Asia'.

Eastern European and Asian deputies who don't know this is a trap.




İngilis və Hindistan: 1. Yüz il bundan qabaq 2. İndiyədək 3. İndi 4. Gələcəkdə.

**England and India; 1. 100 yrs ago 2. Recently 3. Today 4. Future.**



**An Imperial policeman enforces the new law ratified in the Duma, forbidding work on Sundays.**


8 şaban 1328 **Beşimci il** 1 августа 1910 г.

ملا نصر الدين

№30 Qiyməti 12 qəpik. МОЛЛА НАСРЕДДИНЪ Цена 12 k. № 30

Padşahlıq dumanın təzə qərardadı.
Qaradovoy: Bu gün bazardır, gəlin məscidə, gəlin məscidə!..
Гарадовой: Сегодня воскресенье, пошель въ мечеть!

Litoq. S.Bixova

3-38

*"Today is Sunday, go to the Mosque!"*

Padşahlıq dumanın təzə qərardadı
Qaradavoy: *"Bu gün bazardır, gəlin məscidə, gəlin məscidə!"*

**According to the (Russian) Duma announcement, Muslims would also be forbidden to work on Sundays.**

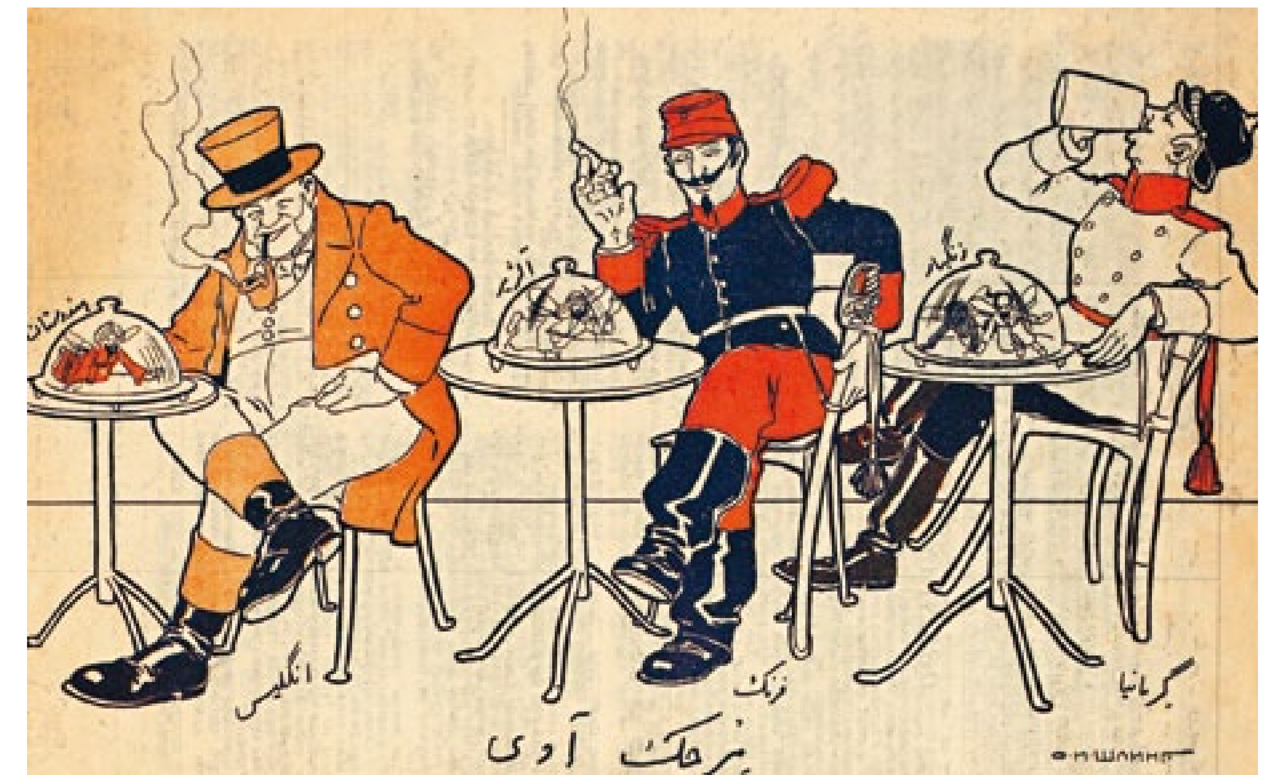



**Duma official:** ***"Time to close shop."***
**Muslim shop owner:** ***"Why are you pulling me out of my store? Do you want me to stay in the tavern like this drunken Russian?"***

Dövlət duması: *"Bağla, bağla dükanını"*
Müsəlman dükançısı: *"Ay canım, niyə məni dükanımdan çıxarırsan, yoxsa istəyirsən ki, mən də o piyan urus kimi gedim girim şərabxanaya?!"*



**Each European nation sits with its colonial subject under the glass plate. Left to right: Britain with India, France with Algeria and Germany with Zanzibar.**




**European politics towards the East: hunting for flies**

Yevropalıların Şərqdəki politikaları: Milçək Ovu.

**The British tie Egypt up with a piece of paper in his mouth marked 'Reforms'. The colonial powers – France, England and Russia – viewed any attempts at reform as contrary to their strategic interests.**



***"We are embalming you so that the mummies don't eat you."***

*"Bərk bağla ki, tərpəşməsin, yoxsa özbaşına ötürsək qaçıb gedər, mumyalar tutub yeyərlər..."*

Englishman in Egypt



Austrian in Bosnia

Turks: *"Even if we destroy the mountains and set fire to our cities, our guests will not leave."*

Misirdə ingilislər / Bosnada avstriyalılar

Türklər: *"Əgər dağlarımızı yıxaq və şəhərləri yandırıb – puça çıxardaq – genə qonaqlarımız getməyəcəklər."*

Interestingly enough, the bear is the only animal without a country assigned to it, though it is clearly Russia.



**Germany (tiger), Spain (fox), England (lion), and France (wolf) surround Morocco (half-man, half-animal), ready to pounce.**

The tiger (Germany) and lion (Britain) fight a proxy battle on behalf of the Ottoman Empire and Iran, respectively, while Morocco (the lamb with human head) is left to be devoured by the foxes and bull.



**The question of borders in the Islamic world**

*Sərhəd məsələsi.* (ittihadi islam)



A Japanese man stands on an Englishman's head, in order to reach the apples on a tree marked Power over Asia and The Philippines. Those already in the basket are marked Korea, China, and Manchuria.



**The English and Japanese join forces**

Ingilis və Yaponiya ittihadı

# THE CAUCASUS

Deemed 'the mountain of languages' by a 10th-century Arab geographer and referred to as 'warm Siberia' in the Russian Empire, the Caucasus has been a case study in ethnic, linguistic and political complexity for over a millennium. Instead of shying away from this Gordian knot or taking sides, *Molla Nasreddin* offers a refreshingly lateral assessment of the region's challenges, especially the hostility between Azeris and Armenians, the tension between tradition and modernity and the numerous foreign forces coveting influence in the region. Sandwiched between a waning Ottoman Empire, a venal Qajar-era Iran, and revolutionary Russia, the Caucasus was a vibrant if unstable region during the early 20th century, which explains the magazine's peripatetic headquarters – travelling from Tbilisi in Georgia to Tabriz in Iran to Baku in Azerbaijan.



Clockwise, from far left: socialist, intellectual, pilgrim, nationalist, spy, mollah.




One man portrays all seven convictions

Yeddi məslək

**During Ramadan, educated Azeris eat furtively to avoid the mollahs' scorn.**

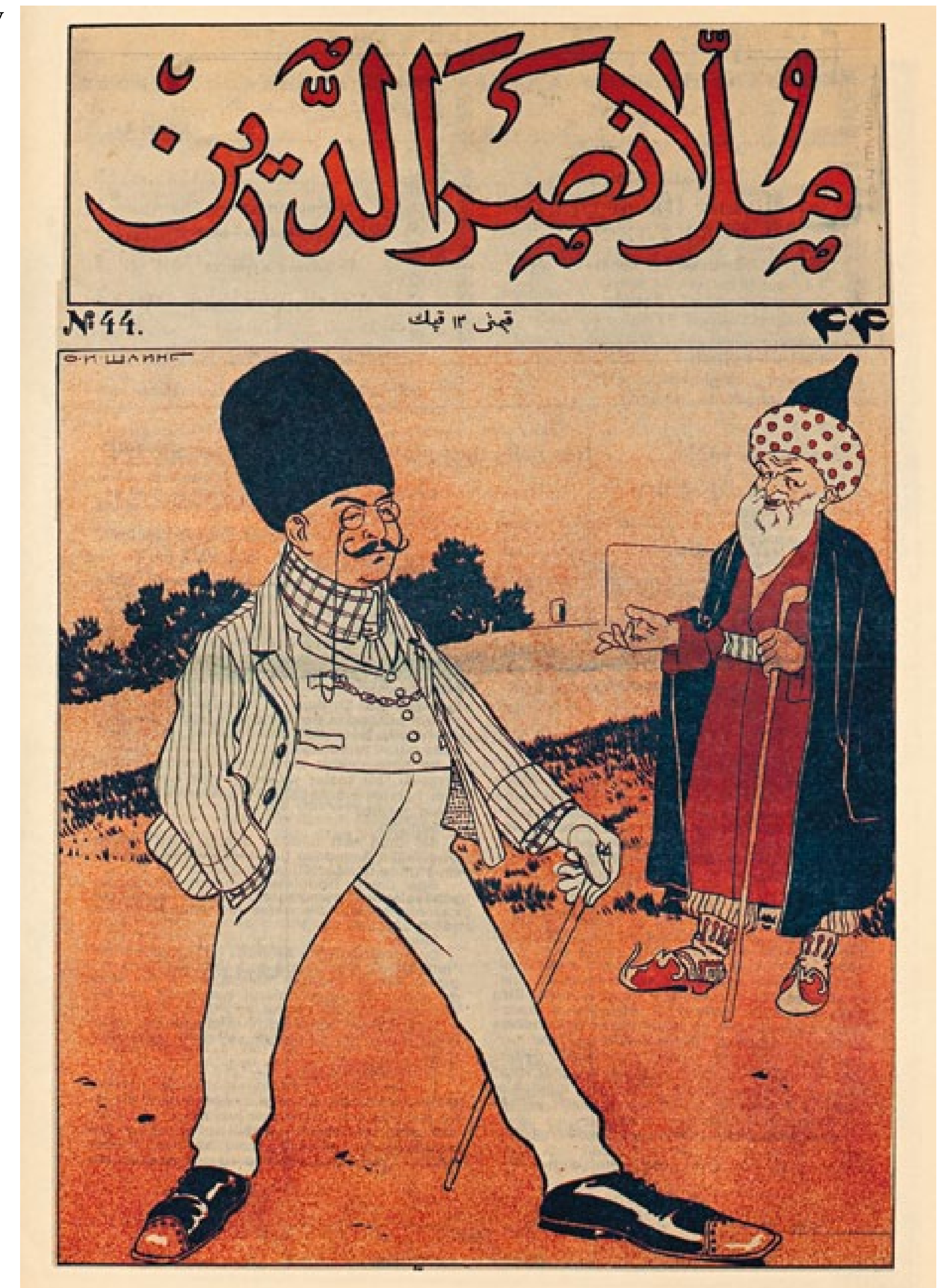



Oruz yeyənlər

**Those who eat during the fast**



**In early 20th century Azerbaijan, mixing and matching fashion did not have the cachet it might today. Here, the man's outfit is parodied as incoherent since the traditional Azeri hat does not sit well with the European clothing and accessories.**




Milləpərəst
Intelliqentniy musulmanin

**An intelligent Muslim and patriot**

**The number of reading rooms which opened to the masses in the early 20th century far outstripped demand.**

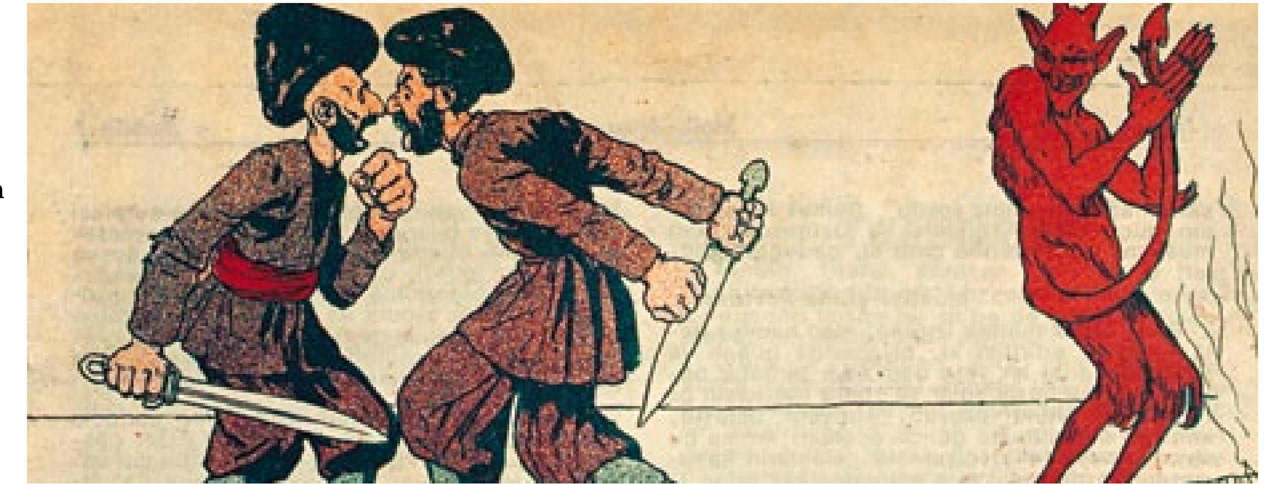



Irəvan qiraətxanası

**Reading room in Yerevan**



**The illustration pokes fun at the long-standing enmity between Armenians and Azeris. The bald man is Azeri and the man with hair Armenian. Apart from this small detail they are more alike than either would care to admit, as is often the case between sworn enemies.**







Bir gün var idi, bir gün yox idi, dünyada allahdan başqa heç kəş yox idi, amma bir axmaq erməni ilə axmaq müsəlman var idi və bunlardan savayı bir şeytan da var idi. Bir gün bu şeytan (Dəxi yer qalmadı)

**There was no one in the world except Allah. But then there was a stupid Armenian, an idiot Azeri and except for them, there was a devil. And one day, the devil… (no more space)**

To celebrate the last Wednesday of the year, Chahar Shanbeh Soori, people gather to jump over a fire as part of the annual Zoroastrian Nowrouz (New Year) festivities. As they leap over the bonfire, they chant: 'Sorkhiyeh to az man; zardiyeh man az to' meaning 'Your redness (health) is mine and my paleness (pain) is yours'.



The last Wednesday of Chahar Shanbeh Soori

Ilin axır çaharşənbəsi

A renowned theatre actor, Husayn Arablinski (1881-1919) was the first thespian to play the role of a woman since women were not allowed to perform on stage. As the fire rages, the clerics rejoice and yell, 'Thank God'. It was not only the clerics who disapproved of Arablinski: his own deeply religious family never accepted of his work as an actor, deemed indecent in traditional Muslim families. Their relations suffered irreparably when Arablinski shaved his moustache to better perform female roles. Arablinski was eventually murdered by his cousin.




Ərəblinski: *"Teatrlarda o qədər xalqın müsibətini göstərdim ki, axırda öz başıma da gəldi! Ax, ax!"* (Bakıda Tağıyevin teatrında "Yanğı" faciəsi)

**Arablinski:** ***"I played so much tragedy and woe on stage that in the end, the woe is on me as well."*** **(The tragedy of Tagiev's theatre burning down in Baku)**





(Bakıda müsəlman ictimainin üçüncü in'aqadı) *"Bizim nə işimiz ki müsəlmanlar bir-birini öldürürlər, allah vara qirib qurtarsınlar."*

**The Baku Muslim Society's third meeting**
***"What does it have to do with us that Muslims kill each other? God willing, one day they'll manage to kill each other off…"***

Depicting an Azeri Muslim being woken from his sleep by the warring factions of Georgians, left, and Armenians, right, this illustration is an indictment of the lost opportunity for Azeris to play the role of arbiter in the complex Caucasian ethnic and political landscape. After the conflicts, the Azeri goes straight back to sleep as if nothing has happened.



**Top: The Caucasian conflicts of 1905**
**Bottom: After the conflicts**

The editors of Molla Nasreddin poke fun at what they see to be the backwardness of Baku: grown men playing leapfrog in the Azeri capital's streets.




Baki küçələrində

**The streets of Baku**



*MN*'s parody of 'Do as I say, not as I do': after invoking the lofty ideals of patriotism and sacrifice, the speaker decides to opt for a life of leisure rather than principle, marrying a European woman and bidding his compatriots farewell.



Student (tələbə) Qardaşlar. *"Canım da malım, da millətə qurban! Öz millətim həqir, zəlil olandan sora mənim varlığım nəyə lazım?"*

***"Brothers, I am ready to sacrifice my life and wealth for our country! Otherwise what value is my life now that our people are so poor and oppressed?"***



*"Student (çinovnik alandan sora): A gədələr, xudahafiz."*

***"See you later, idiots."***

**Ahmed Beg Agayev, aka Ahmed Beg Ogolulu, an Azerbaijani politician and pan-Islamist, dreams of Muslim missionaries, left, converting Japan to Islam.**



**The dream of Ahmad Beg Agayev: Japan's conversion to Islam**

Əhmed Bəy Ağayevin yuxusu
Yaponiya islamı qəbul edəndən sonra



**Ottoman in between Europeans**



**Woman in between Muslim men**



**Iran in between mollah and shah**
**The stronger always wins and rules**

Əlhökmilimən qələbə - Hökm və yaşamaq gücünündür.



**Khiabani, a Muslim conservative, is aghast at the music and society of the far more European city Tbilisi.**




**Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani, the Iranian Parliamentary representative for Tabriz, arrives in Tbilisi.** ***"Why did you bring me here? What horror! There's music here. I am leaving…"***

*"Bay, bay, burada muzik çalınır. Məni niyə bura gətirdiniz? Mən qaçıram."*

**On the centennial of his birth date, *Molla Nasreddin* published a commemorative cover honouring the prominent intellectual and playwright Mirzah Fatali Akhundov (aka Akhundzadeh, 1812–1878). One of the first to advocate strongly for the latinisation of the Azeri language (as did the editorial team of *MN*), Akhundov embodies the complex sense of identity often found in the region as he wrote some of his most famous works in Persian and is also considered a founder of modern Iranian literature.**



18 zilhicce 1329 | Altıncı il | 27 ноября 1911 г.

ملا نصرالدين

№42 Qiymәti 12 qәpik. МОЛЛА НАСРЕДДИНЪ Цена 12 k. № 42

Litoq. S.Bixova.

MİRZƏ FƏTƏLİ AXUNDOV *(anadan olmağının yüz illiyi münasibətilə)*

*Bəli, hələ bəs deyil ki, müsəlman arvadlarını teatr tamaşagahlarına çıxardı və bizim abrumuzu tökdü, bunlar bəs deyil?! Hələ bu nainsafı cəmi müsəlman aləmi yada salıb, rəhmət oxuyub və bunun şəklinə baxıb fəxr eyləyir.*

*Мирза Фатали, знаменитый драматург*

*Въ толпе:* *«А ведь впервые этотъ безбожникъ вывелъ на сцену благочестивую нашу женщину и осрамилъ насъ, и все-таки его чествуютъ и имъ гордятся».*

**Mirza Fatali Akhundov (notable playwright): *"This atheist was the first to put on plays with our virtuous women and thus shamed Muslim women and yet, they still honour him and take pride in him."***

Mirzə Fətəli Axundov (anadan omağının yüz illiyi münasibətilə) *"Bəli, hələ bəs deyil ki, müsəlman arvadlarını teatr tamaşagahlarına çıxartdı və bizim abrumuzu tökdü, bunlar bəs deyil?! Hələ bu nainsafı cəmi müsəlman aləmi yada salıb, rəhmət oxuyub və bunun şəklinə baxıb fexr eyləyir."*



**When Akhundov died, the authorities forbid his burial in a Muslim cemetery because he was accused of atheism. A seyed is a pious Muslim who can trace his lineage back to Mohammad.**




***"Whose destroyed gravestone is this?" "Mirza Fatali Akhundov's." "And the one with the cupola?" "A seyed's."***

*"Bu dağılmış qəbir kimindir?" "Mirzə Fətəli Axundovundur." "Bəs bu gümbəzli qəbir kimindir?" "Bu da seyid qəbridir."*

**Borchali is a region in current-day Georgia largely inhabited by Azeris.**



**A fight between two Borchali Muslims on the way to Tbilisi**

Tiflisdə konkada iki nəfər Borçalı müsəlmanlarının davası.

Left to right, dervishes with instruments (daf) and their pupils (murids), Iranian bureaucrats with official documents, and mollahs with their religious books cross the the Araz river, which once marked the boundary between Imperial Russia and Iran and today divides Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Dear guests at the notable Araz river

Yer üzərində məşhur Araz çayı Əziz qonaqlar

# THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Lasting more than six centuries and spanning three continents at its height, the Ottoman Empire finally began to crumble in the early 20th century. The various events leading up to its demise and immediate aftermath feature prominently in the pages of *Molla Nasreddin*, including the crookedness of Ottoman officials, the rise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the arrival of the Young Turks. By coincidence, the Empire's dissolution took place only a couple years after the launch of *MN*, providing the magazine with so much fodder for satire that we'd be forgiven for thinking the Ottoman Empire was the funny – rather than sick –man of Europe.



**The Greeks (dogs) are excited and yet scared of the imminent implosion of the Ottoman Empire. A century later, with Greece in the full throes of an economic crisis and an ascendent Turkey, the inverse seems to be the case.**




***"Why are you barking?" "Because we want to frighten." "Why are your tails wagging?" "Because we are already frightened ourselves."***

*"Niyə hürürsünüz?" "Qorxuduruq."*
*"Bəs niyə quyruğunuzu bulayursunuz? Qorxuruq."*

**The mouthpiece of the Menshikovs, the publication *Novoe Vremya* pins down three Young Turks in an effort to lay bare the discrepancy between their stated objectives and the reality on the ground.**

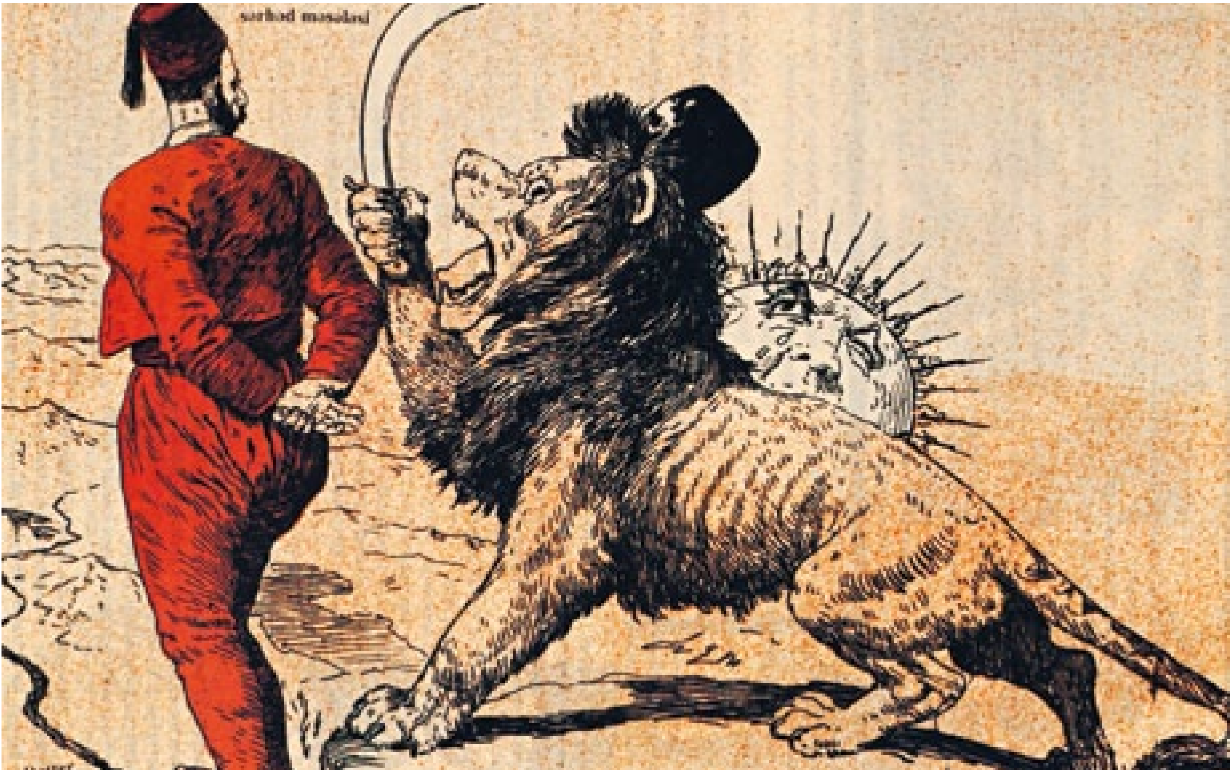



**Menşikov:** ***"Cavan türklərin politikası millətçilikdir! Təzə qanun ilə hər millətə bir dərəcədə müsavat və hüquq vermək istəyirlər, halbuki bu insafsızlıqdır: bulğarlara, rumlara, ermənilərə "avtonomiya" vermək lazımdır."***

***"The Young Turks' politics amounts to pure nationalism. They claim to give people equality and justice but this is ridiculous. If so, they should give the Greeks and Bulghars autonomy."***



**The lion and sun, a well-known emblem of Iran that featured on the national flag from 1424 until 1979, warns the Ottoman not to cause any unnecessary border skirmishes.**



**Persia (Osmanlıya):** ***"Bu əskikliyə dözə bilmərik və nə qədər canımız sağdır, gərək çalışaq ki, sərhəddən bir qədəm qabağ qoymayasınız. Cəmi bədbəxtliyimizə səbəb sizsiniz."***

**Iran (to the Ottomans):** ***"We can't rest easy with this chaos. As long as we are alive, we must make sure that you don't take one step over our boundary. We are unhappy only because of you."***

**Holding banners that read, left to right: Liberty, Constitution and Justice, the angels stand in for the Persian Empire (bearing tiaras with the emblem of lion and sun) whose revolutionary Constitutional Reform movement frightened countries in the region.**



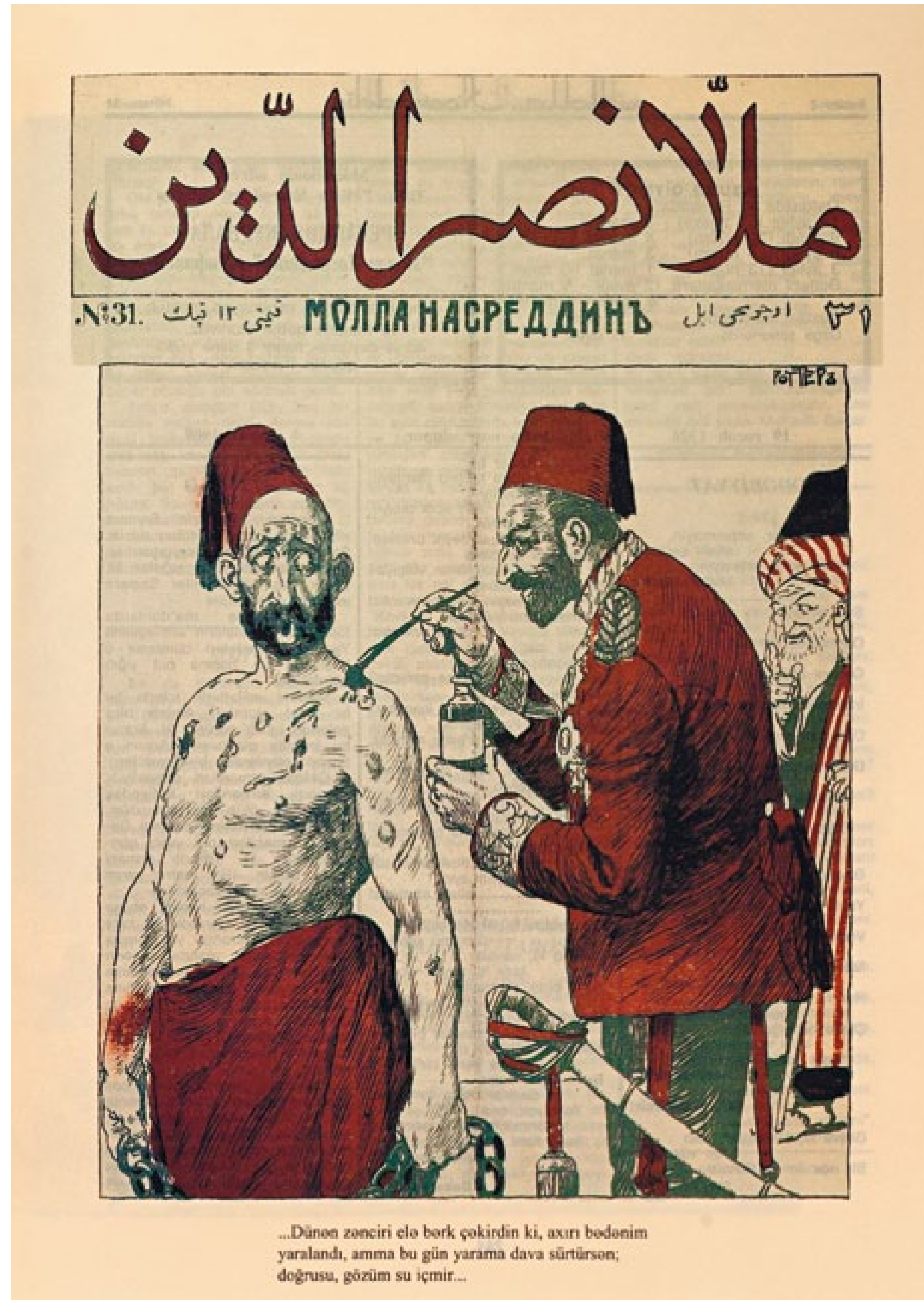
Osmanli Iran Fas məsələsi

**On the issue of the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Egypt**

Using the Greek mythological symbol of the bull for Europe, the illustration criticises European passivity towards the ailing Ottoman empire. Today, with Turkey enjoying an unparalleled period of economic growth and political stability, the European Union continues to drag its feet on the question of membership.

The devastation of European politics

Virana dair

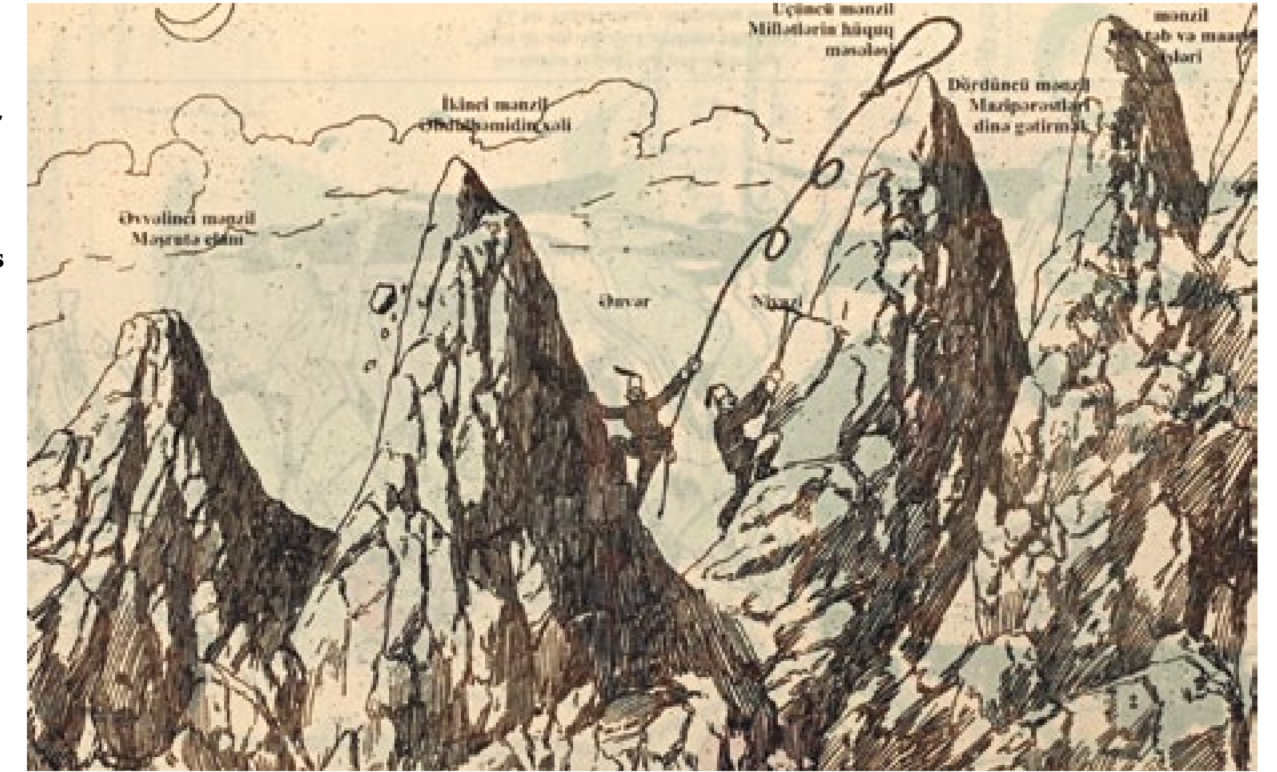



*"Yesterday you tied me up in strong chains causing me injury. But today, you're rubbing oil to heal my wounds. This all seems rather suspicious to me."*

*"…Dünən zənciri elə bərk çəkirdin ki, axırı bədənim yaralandı, amma bu gün yarama dava sürtüsən; doğrusu, gözüm su içmir…"*



**Enver Pasha, (1881–1922) a Turkish military officer and a founder of the Young Turk movement, and Ahmed Niyazi scale the major milestones of reform with Niyazi. Left to right: the declaration of reforms, getting rid of Sultan Abul Hamid, the question of ethnic rights, and educational affairs among others.**




**The journey of the Young Turks**

Cavan türklərin səfəri

**The Ottoman Empire runs away with Crete (the cat) while the British, Russian, and others chase him.**




*"Don't bother running after me. I won't give it to any of you!"*

Osmanlı: *"Nahaq yerə qaçıb özünüzü yormayın, Siz öləsiniz, heç kəsə verən deyiləm…"*

A member of the Young Turks leads old clerks and members of the Ottoman Empire's security apparatus away by a leash.



*"Enough! You've ruled us for 32 years."*

*"… Bəsdir otuz iki il ağalıq elədiniz…"*
(Osmanlının köhnə idarə əxfiyyələri və işləri).

**The Ottoman government busily feeds Germany, left, and Austria at the table while others (left to right: Italy, Bulgaria, Serbia) must wait. The train set refers to the legendary Berlin-Baghdad Railway commissioned by the Ottomans and built by the Germans.**




*Osmanlı: "Hələ səbr edin, sizə də verəcəyəm."*

***"Be patient, you'll be served too…"***






*Batumda osmanlı şəhbəndəri Rəmzi bəy. Xanımlar: "Amandı, bəy əfəndim, getmə buradan, bizə rəhmin gəlsin." Rəmzi bəy: "Ax, çarəm nə? İndi Əbdülhəmid əsri deyil, indi ixtiyar millətdədir: haraya buyursa, gərək gedəm."*

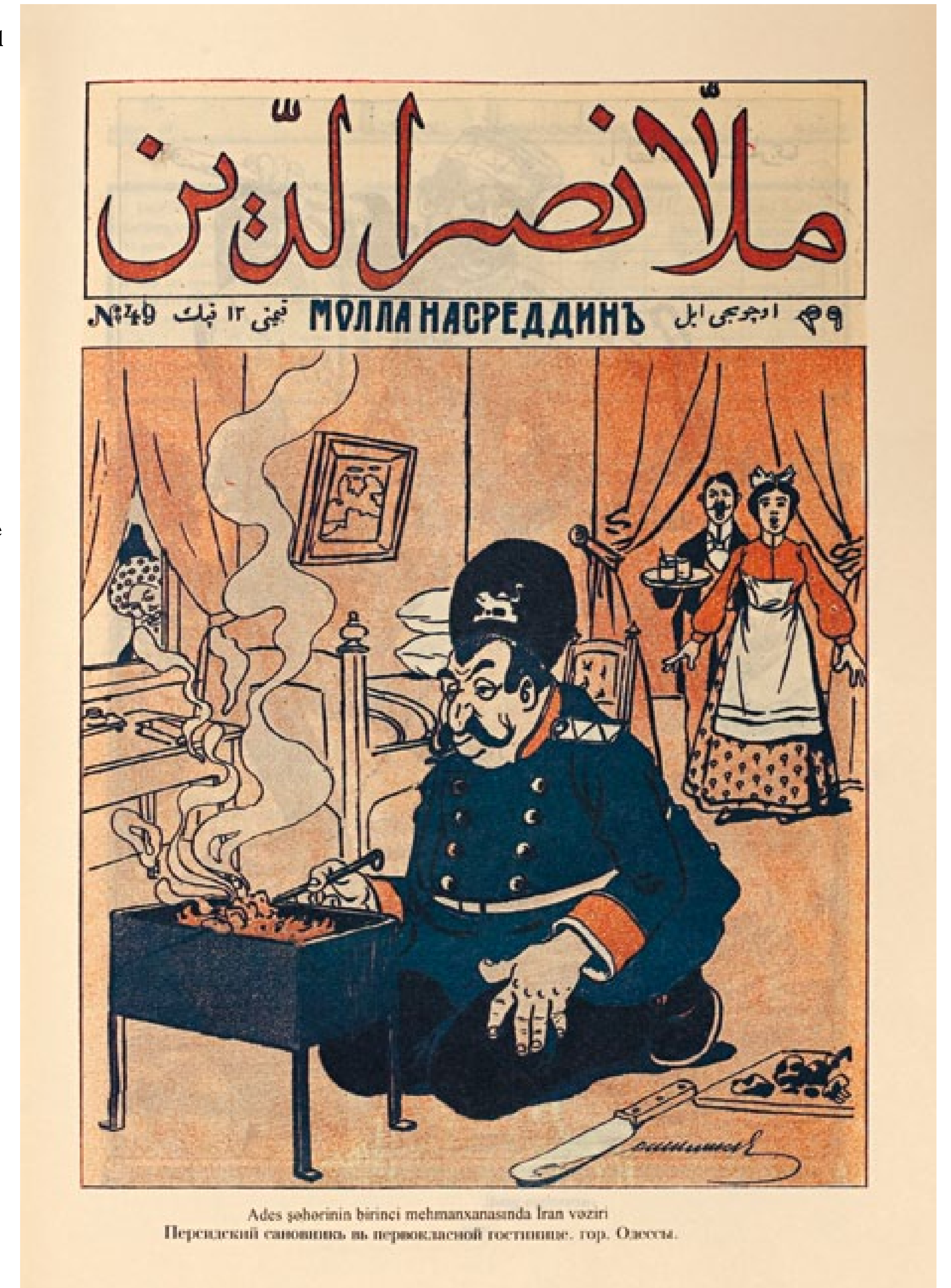
**Women:** ***"Don't go, Ramzi Bey Effendi!"*** **Ramzi Bey:** ***"What am I to do? It's no longer the good old days of Abdulhamid. Power is now in the hands of the people. Where they send me, I must go."***

# IRAN

In true Azeri form, *Molla Nasreddin* had a love-hate relationship with Iran. While covering almost every notable event which took place in its Shi'ite neighbour, *MN* saw Iran as a monolithic source of all it condemned: first and foremost, vibrant Islamism. Yet Iran was arguably the country where the magazine had its largest number of readers not to mention its largest impact, spawning a range of copy-cat publications across the border and weighing in heavily on the major players of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1910, which resulted in the first parliament in all of Asia. Still, the editorial staff continued to snub its neighbour to the south: focussing relentlessly on the Qajars' venality, unequal treatment of women and, in particular, the role of revivalist Islam in the reform movements leading to the Constitutional Revolution. It is a pity the periodical is no longer around: one can only imagine the heyday *Molla Nasreddin* would have with the machinations of the country's current iteration, the Islamic Republic of Iran.



**A staunch opponent of the Constitutional Revolution ratified by his father, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah, Mohammad Ali Shah, the Qajar ruler of Iran, bombarded the Majles with the military help of the Russians and political support of the Brits. But the Revolution's second wave forced him to flee to Odessa in 1909. In exile, he prepares his shishlik kebab on a grill in his hotel room to the astonishment of the staff.**




**An Iranian bureaucrat in a first class hotel in Odessa**

Adəs şəhərinin birinci mehmanxanasında İran vəziri.

**The illustration parodies the Constitutional Revolution taking place across the border in Iran as one still beholden to the religious establishment. A native of Tabriz, in the Azerbaijani region of Iran and a popular figure of the revolution, Bagher Khan (1870–1911) was credited with the defence of the city and was given the honorary title Salar-e Melli (Leader of the Nation).**




*"Əgər 5 nəfər laməzhəb vəkil Tehrandan cıxmasalar, məclisi dağıdacağam."*

**Bagher Khan's speech: *"Hand over all the Atheist deputies, otherwise I will destroy the Majles."***



**The plate is labelled 'Hurriyet' (freedom) and the fly is Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri, the cleric who aligned himself with Mohammad Ali Shah against the Constitutionalists. He was executed for treason on July 31, 1909 and is revered as a martyr today by conservative elements in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Many armchair analysts believe the roots of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 can be specifically traced to the failure of the Constitutional Revolution and the CIA-sponsored coup d'état against Mohammad Mossadeq in the early and middle 20th century, respectively.**




*"Qoy hürriyyətin üstünü tez örtüm ki, milçək hürriyyətin üstünə nöqtə salmasın."*

***"I better hurry up and cover freedom faster so that no flies manage to sit on it."***

**The first monarch of modern Iran to visit Europe in three successive trips (1873, 1878, 1889), Nasser Al-Din Shah Qajar grew enamoured with the advances in technology and infrastructure he witnessed there and strove to launch similar initiatives upon his return, including a modern postal system, banking system, and trains.**



**Nasser Al-Din Shah:** ***"Ah, Europe, when will I see you again?"***

*"Ax Yevropa, bir də nə vaxt səni görəcəyəm!"*



**Darius, the Achaemenid king of kings of the 6th century BC, tells the man to keep watering the contemporary Iranian (the plant), to help him grow.**




***"Keep on pouring some water."***

*"Susuzsan, əzizim, onunçün əmələ gəlmirsən."*

**Iran continues to suffer from fractious political groups, movements and parties. Like many exiled nations or diasporas, Iranians abroad (here, in Paris) are particularly prone to such divisions.**


8 rəcəb 1328 **Beşimci il** 4 июля 1910 г.

ملا نصرالدين

№26 Qiyməti 12 qəpik. МОЛЛА НАСРЕДДИНЪ Цена 12 k. № 26

İranlı: – Cənab polismən. Heyif ki, mən sənin dilivi bilmirəm. Ancaq saat buraya gələndə sən də gəl bizim İran komitəsinə və qoyma ki, üzvlər bir-birinin başını yarsın (Parijdə). Litoq. S.Bixova

3-36

*Iranlı: "Cənab polismən. Heyif ki, mən sənin dilivi bilmirəm. Ancaq saat buraya gələnde sən də gəl bizim Iran komitəsinə və qoyma ki, üzvlər bir-birinin başını yarsın"* (Parijdə).

***"Dear Mr. Policeman, it's a pity I don't speak your language. But when the watch hand hits this hour, could I ask you to come to our committee and make sure we Iranians don't hit each other on the head."***



**A biting critique of the role of clerics in the newly formed Iranian Majles (Parliament): the 'Sina' (literally: chest) refers to the self-flagellation of the Shi'ite Ashura-Tasua ceremonies.**



**Act 1**

Əvvəlinci Pərdə



**Act 2 (Sina Majles in Iran)**

Ikinci Pərdə (Iranda "Sina" məclisi)

A satire of the lack of central government in Iran, the map lists each region, left, alongside the person ruling it, right.

The Unites States of Iran
(like the United States of America)



| *States* | *Governors* |
|---|---|
| The Sultanate of Maku | Eqbal os-Saltaneh |
| The Kindgom of Tabriz | Mir Hashem |
| The Emirate of Maraghe | Haji Samad Khan |
| The Governate of Ardebil | Mirza Ali Akbar |
| The Empire of Urmia | Mohammad Beg Dashli |
| The Caliphate of Gilan | The Shariatmadar |
| The Princepate of Quchan | Salar-e Mofakhkham |
| The Emirate of Astarabad | Sepahdar |
| The Principality of Shiraz | Qavam [ol-Molk] |
| The Tehran Khanate | Mohammad Ali |
| The Qom Empire | The Motavallibashi |
| The Esfahan Khanate | Aqa Najafi |
| The Sultanate of Eraq | Haji Aqa Mohsen |
| The Salmas Principality | Simko |
| The Qaen Khadivate | Heshmat ol-Molk |

*The officers of the Tehran Khanate:*

| | |
|---|---|
| Prime Minister | Amir-e Bahador-e Jang |
| Minister of the Interior | Mojallal [os-Saltaneh] |
| The Foreign Minister | Arfa ol-Dawleh |
| Minister of the Treasury | Shapshal |
| The Sheik ol-Eslam | Sheikh Fazlollah |
| Minister of the Navy | Aslan Khan |




Iran

**Iran**





“Günahı budur ki əri yox olandan dörd il sora gedib bir özgə kişiyə.”

***“Her sin is that she married another man four years after her husband had disappeared.”***



Natiq: “Camaat, din əldən getdi, övrəti gərək səngsar edək.”

***“Brothers and sisters, faith is in decline: we must throw rocks at this woman.”***




Səngsar olunmuş övrət. İyirminci əsrdə İran ədliyyəsi

**Woman killed by stoning: Iranian justice in the 20th century (in Kochan, Iran)**

**Britain (in top hat) beckons everyone to join in eating the rice pilaf (Iran, as denoted by the Royal Lion on the lamb's forehead). While Russia, seated, digs in, the Ottoman Empire observes cautiously from near the window and Mohammad Ali Shah, ruler of Iran, pokes his head in at the door. Mohammad Ali Shah helped quell the Constitutional Revolution of Iran with the military support of Russia and Britain.**


Nömrə 45 — **Dördüncü il** — Səhifə 1

ملا نصر الدين

№45 Qiymәti 12 qәpik. **МОЛЛА НАСРЕДДИНЪ** Цена 12 k. №45



Litoq. S.Bixova

– Buyur, buyur, sәn dә buyur! Vaxt keçirmәyәk ki, soyumasın. Sonra lәzzәtli yeyilmәz.
– Пожалуйте, пожалуйте! Не надо мешкать, а то остынеть, потом будет не так вкусно!

3-18

*"Have a seat, please, hurry up or it might get cold and won't be as delicious!"*

*"Buyur, buyur, sən də buyur! Vaxt keçirməyək ki, soyumasın. Sonra ləzzətli yeyilməz."*



**In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Qajar reign suffered several setbacks and was significantly weakened by concessions to foreign powers, notably Russia and Great Britain.**



**Stinky, Qajar microbes discovered by Kokhom.**

**Püf, bu "Qacar" qurdları nə yaman qoxur…**

**While the Russian Army seems ready for battle, the Iranian army does not seem to require enemies as it injures itself. The reference below is to Ashura-Tasua, the Shi'ite ritual of inflicting a wound on one's forehead in homage to the martyrdom of Imam Hossein at the hands of the Sunni Caliph Yazid.**




**Russia vs. Iran: An irregular army which doesn't worry about spilling its own blood.**

**Vətən uğrunda qanlarını əsirgəməyən nizamlı qoşunlar.**

**Mohammad Ali Shah cuts Iran (the ram) into pieces while bureaucrats take what they can. The ram's head is labelled Tehran, his front legs the regions of Khorasan and Gilan and hind legs Esfahan and Azerbaijan. In the end, Ali Shah is left with only the horns, the least valued part of the animal.**








**The devil kidnaps the Majles or Iranian parliament building, also referred to as 'Baharestan'. Though *Molla Nasreddin* was very influential for the actors of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, the editorial team looked upon the movement with scepticism as the leaders sometimes mobilised Islamic zeal in their opposition to the Shah. A similar phenomenon occurred some 75 years later in Poland where the Catholic Church played the role of non-partisan arbiter between Solidarność and the Communist government of Jaruzelski.**




***"Next to the dragon I am a bull, but when I have grabbed the Majles, I am a dragon."***

*"Əjdahalar yanında mən öküzəm, amma belə məclisləri əldə saxlamağa əjdahayam..."*

**After abolishing the Majles (Parliament) on the grounds that it was against Islamic law and subsequently bombing the building, Mohammad Ali Shah (1872–1925) fled Iran to Odessa in 1909 following the second wave of the Constitutional Revolution. Here he dresses to the nines, ready to woo the women.**




Krımda təzə xanımlar kavaleri *"Mamedka"*
*"Rus xanımlarca da Iran mənim qədrimi bilmədi."*

**A new cruising cavalier, Little Moe, arrives in the Crimea:**
***"Iran couldn't appreciate me as the Russian women have."***



**After centuries of relative torpor, a semblance of Islamic nationalism and independence movements startle the European powers at the turn of the 20th century.**




Avropa: *Baho!...Müsəlmanlar bir-bir oyanıb beşikdən çıxdılar...*

**Europe: *"Oh my! The Muslims have woken up and are leaving the cradle."***

**The illustration pokes fun at the traditional, full-body cover of the Shah's mother and the curiosity of the Austrian delegation.**




Avstriya sərhəddində hökumət mə'murları nizama durub şahın validəsini gözləyirlər.

**On the border with Austria, government bureaucrats wait to honour the Shah's mother.**

# THE BALKANS

With the Ottoman Empire on its last legs, the Balkans began to unravel, leaving Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania, amongst others, to fend for themselves against a slew of empires waiting on the sidelines, from Russia to the Austro-Hungarian Empire to Britain. Perhaps a nod to the strong tradition of folklore and fables in the southern Slavic region, *Molla Nasreddin* often used animals to portray various countries located or interested in the Balkans.



**Austria (fox) holds Bosnia, the meat, in his mouth as Germany (tiger), Russia (bear), Serbia (small dog, right) and Montenegro (dog, left) encircle it. Given that *MN* was subject to the censors of Imperial Russia, the bear is often unnamed in caricatures featuring animals.**




**The Balkan Question**

Balkanli məsələsi

**Albania, caricatured as the large and fearless warrior, is surrounded by Greeks, Ottomans and Serbs.**

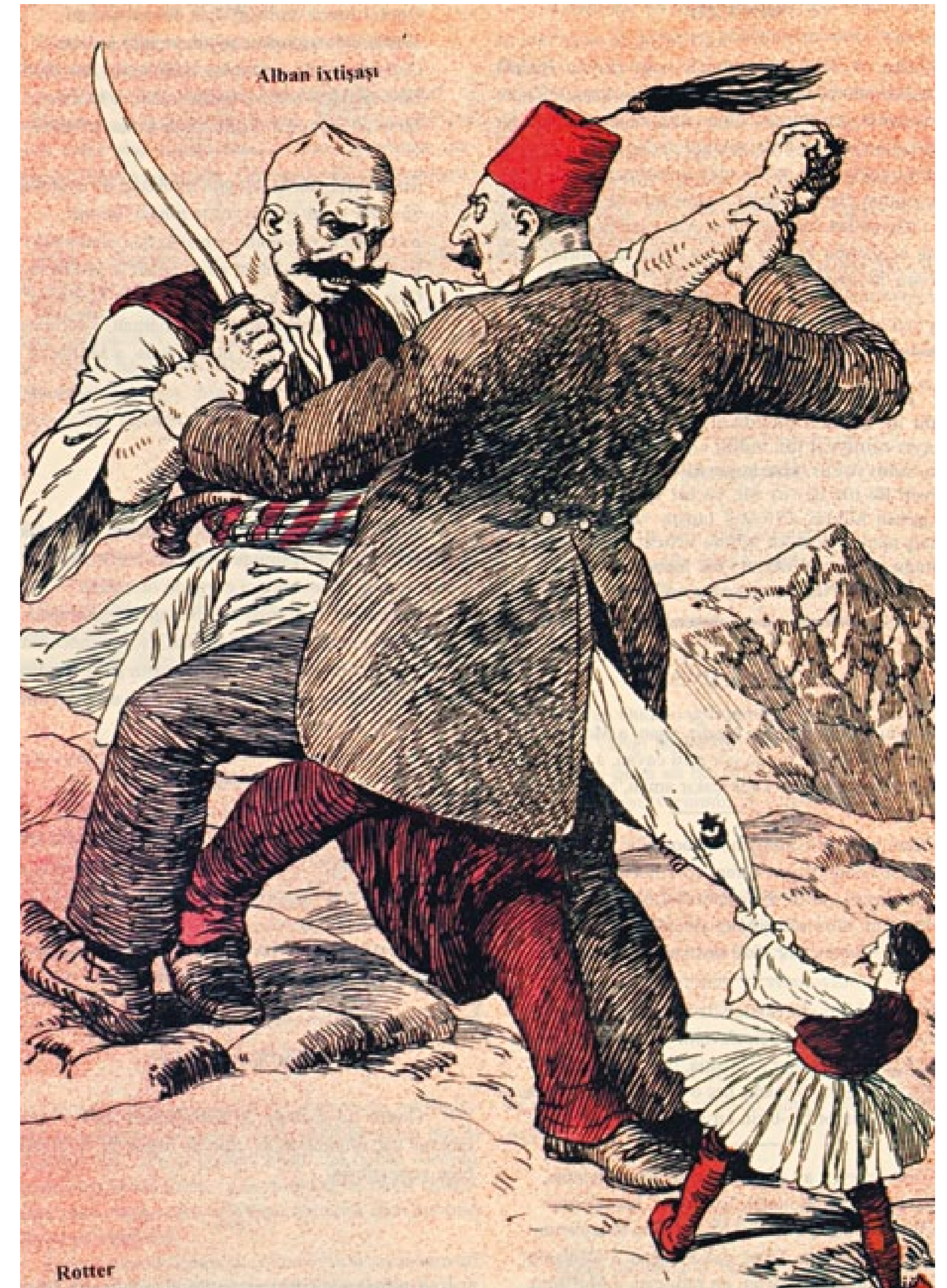


*"Bu xırdaca adamları bir təpiyim ilə əzərəm. Amma qorxuram qonşular təpiyimin səsinə qorxalar."*

***"I can smash all these tiny people to pieces with one kick but I am worried that it will scare away my neighbours."***



**A diminutive Greece, right, takes advantage of the Ottoman Empire's distractions, in this case a fight with Albania, left, to pinch Crete on the sly.**




**Qəzetlər xəbər verirlər ki, ğəriqlər fürsəti qənimət bilib Kridi oğurlamaq fikrinə düşüblər.**

**Foreign powers use the occasion to steal Crete.**

The island on the bottom is Crete, the black dog above Greece and the man at left with stick and hat is Britain, chasing all the birds with fez on their heads back to Anatolia. Italy bathes his legs in the water (left, partially pictured) while Austria covers his ears at the top (not pictured here) and Russia, the bearded man, far right, watches with a large stick. The black dogs between Russia and Britain are Serbia, top left, and Bulgaria, top right.

The end of the Macedonian events (or the ejection of the Turks from Europe)

The Turks in Anatolia

Makedoniya məsələsinin axırı (ve ya türklərin Yevropadan qovulmağı)
Yevropada türklərin halı
Anadolu türklərinin halı

**The Turk, referring to Serbia and Bulgaria (seated):** ***"When these friends are nice to me, something always goes wrong. You need to be careful, God willing."***



6 rəbiüləxır 1328 | Beşimci il | 4 апреля 1910 г.

ملا نصر الدين

№13 Qiymәti 12 qәpik. МОЛЛА НАСРЕДДИНЪ Цена 12 k. № 13



Osmanlı: – Bu dostlar mənə mehriban olanda həmişə evimdən bir şey yox olub. Ehtiyatlı olmaq lazım gəlir. Allaha pənah.

Litoq. S.Всхова

**Entertainment faux-pas: inviting the Balkans and Ottomans to the same event.**

**Osmanlı:** ***"Bu dostlar mənə mehriban olanda həmişə evimdən bir şey yox olub. Ehtiyatlı olmaq lazım gelir. Allaha pənah".***



**While the Russians, Ottomans and Serbians lounge in the background, Austria tries to capture Albania but make it seem as if it fell on its own.**





**Austria:** ***"We need to be very careful shaking the tree so that the apple falls itself."***

**Avstriya:** ***"Ağacı ehtiyat ilə silkələmək lazımdır, alma özü-özünə düşəcək."***

**The man crossing the log is Austria, the case in front of him Bosnia-Hercegovina and the heavy sack behind him, '35 billion spent'. After three centuries of Ottoman rule, Bosnia-Hercegovina was annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878. Substantial amounts of time and money were invested to cultivate the state into a model colony in an attempt to counter the South Slav nationalism sweeping the region.**




*"Ay kişi, lap evim yıxıldı, mənim fikrim köhnə osmanlıya getdi."*

***"I am completely broke. I thought that it would be just like during Ottoman times."***



**Under Russia's foot (bear) is a piece of meat marked '150 million Bulgarian currency' while Bulgaria (small fox) and Turkey (large fox) prowl nearby.**




Balkanli məsələsi

**The Balkan Question**

# REFORM

The corruption and venality plaguing the Caucasus at the turn of the century was a formidable foe for any progressive platform, including *Molla Nasreddin*. Of the several-headed hydra which drove political graft in the region, two are particularly important here: the competitive intrigue of Britain and Russia's Great Game which lasted much of the 19th century, and the tug of war between reformists and traditionalists which created fertile ground for authority of all types – police, parliamentarians, businessmen – to scheme opportunistically with an ease that, in the 21st century, does not seem to have diminished.



**The doctor applies hirudotherapy, in the form of leeches used for bloodletting, to his patient to cure the illness of reformism. 'Haram' means 'forbidden'.**




**Iran:** ***"Doctor, enough! Please stop sucking my blood! I'd rather die and be done with it."*** **Doctor:** ***"No, no, your blood is 'haram', because it aspires to reform. We're going to need to change every last drop."***

**Iran:** ***"Ay həkim, bu qədər sordunuz bəsdi, vallah canım çıxır…"*** **Həkim:** ***"Yox, yox, bəs deyil. Sənin qanına haram qanı qatışıb. Məşrutə qanı qatışıb. Gərək lap təmizlənə."***

**Ismail Gasprinski (1851-1914) was a prominent Crimean Tatar intellectual and proponent of educational reform in Turkic and Islamic communities. Founder of the journal *Terğüman* ('Translator'), a progressive journal which ran from 1883 to 1918, Gasprinski advocated unity among Turkic peoples, the need for education in one's mother tongue, and modernisation through Europeanisation.**




**Ismail Beg Gasprinski**



**The illustration satirises the collusion of the Islamic establishment with the Russian authorities and the culture clash between the two.**




**A St. Petersburg commission studying the question of Islamic schools**

Peterburqda müsəlman məktəbləri məsələsinə baxan komissiya.

**The religious establishment drives a wedge into the head of a reformist to impede his progress.**

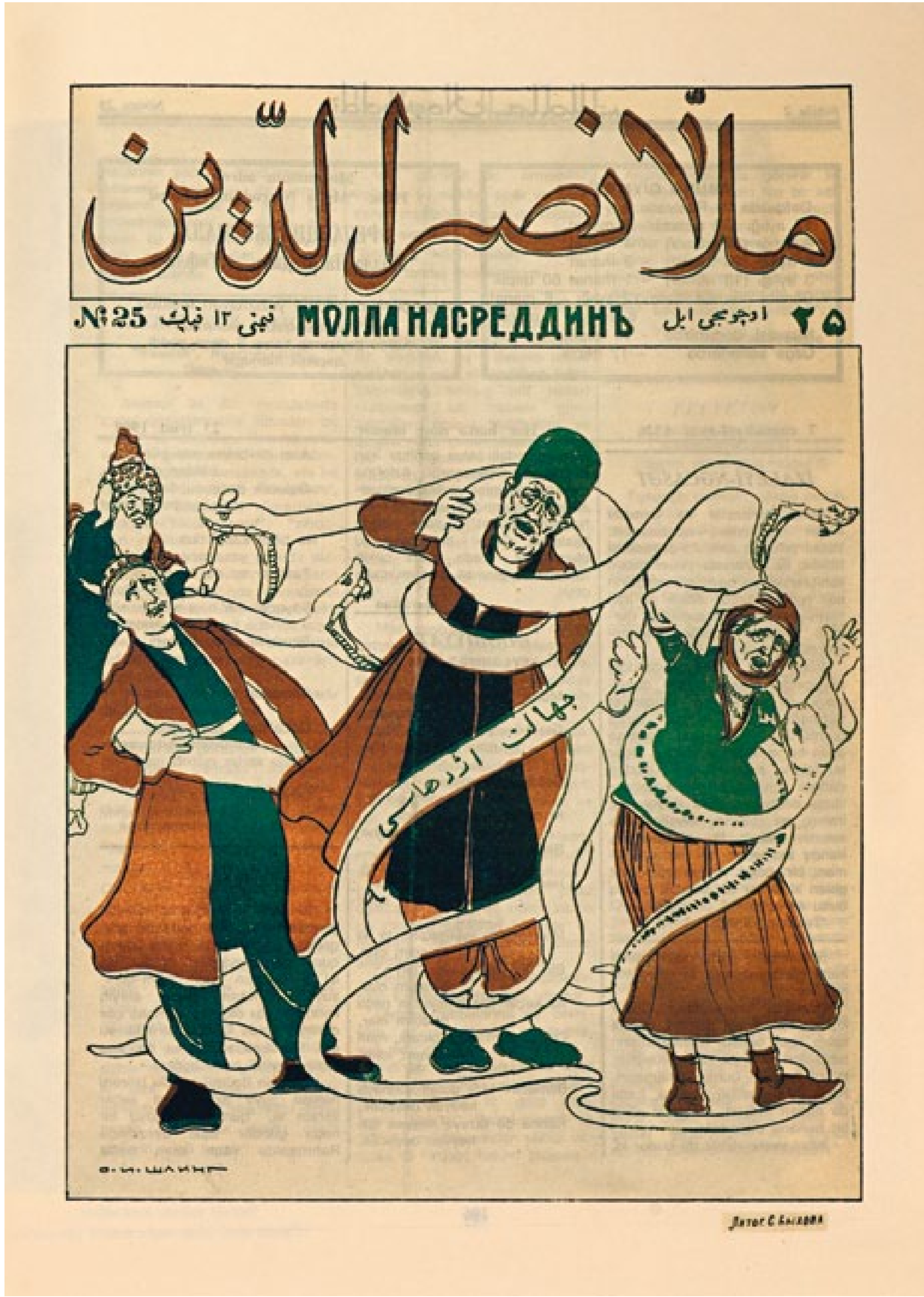



***"I advise you to beat him in the brain so that he cannot understand our future plans."***

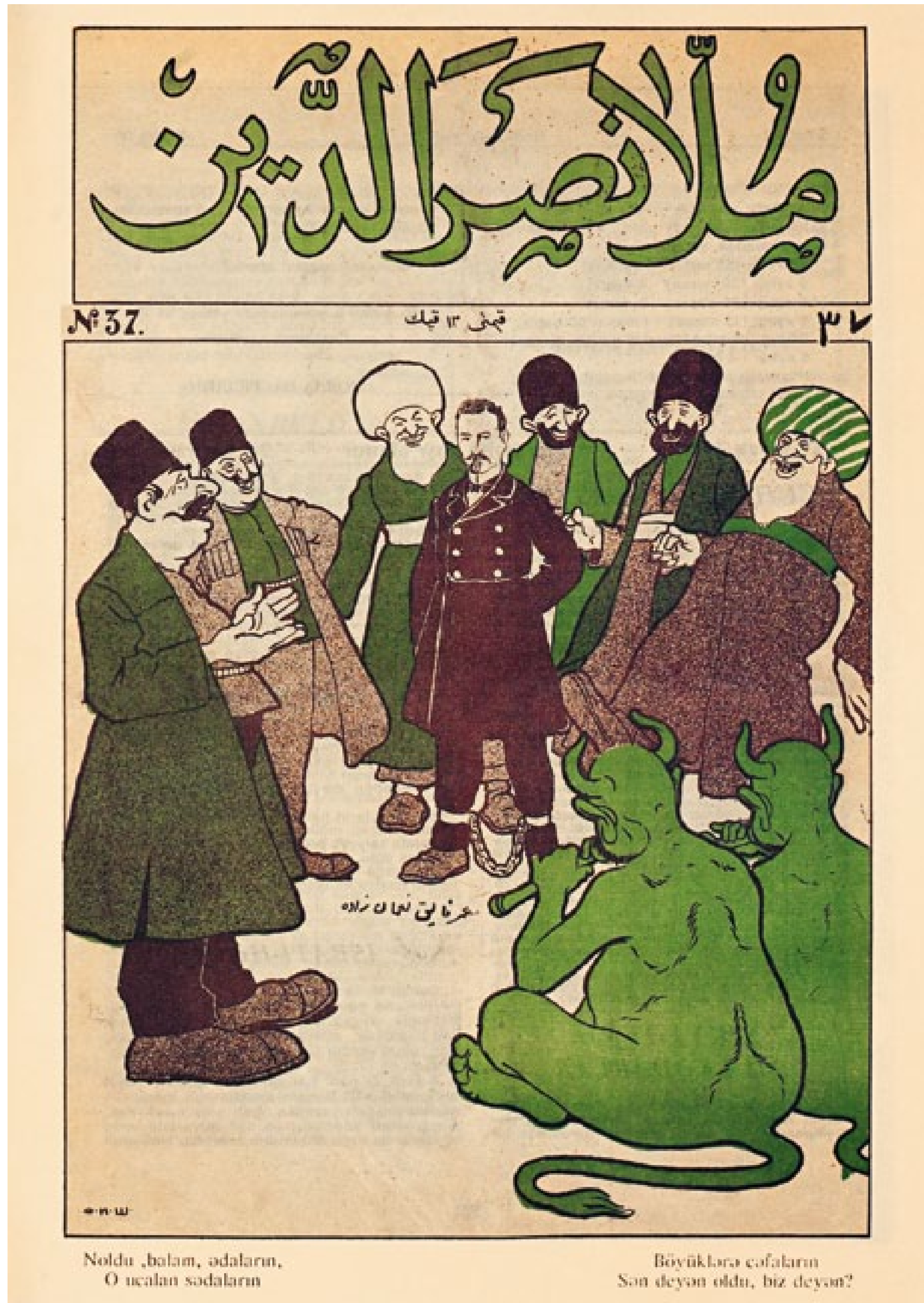
*"Məsləhət budur ki, bunun beynini cıxardaq, bizim bir para işlərimizi başa düşməsin."*



**The snake strangling the three people is labelled 'ignorance'.**



**Devils, mollahs and others taunt the chained Omar Faeq Namanzadeh, a founder and co-editor of *MN* with Jalil Mammadguluzadeh. Much like his colleague Alekper Sabir, Namanzadeh often ran into trouble for his biting satirical articles and worked under several pseudonyms, including Umidvar (hopeful), Umid (hope), Laglagi and Mozalan.**




***"What happened, my son, to your justice, / That rising voice of yours? That big shot's punishment of yours. / Was it as you said or as I said?"***

*"Noldu, balam, ədaların, O ucalan sədaların"*
*"Böyüklərə cəfaların Sən deyən oldu, biz deyən?"*



**The illustration addresses Russia's difficulties in moving towards some element of representational government during the tumultuous first decade of the 20th century. The hen is a representative of the Third Duma and has already broken the First and Second, as can be seen by the eggshells in the foreground. As the French say, *plus ça change*…Today's Russia seems to be in a similar predicament: within three decades it has moved from non-representational government in the Soviet era to a chaotic period of representational government in the decade following the collapse of the USSR to an authoritarian semi-democracy under Vladimir Putin.**



***"Good job, now be careful not to break the third one as well."***

*"Ay bərəkallah, beləcə yaxşı otur ki, bu üçüncü yumurta da laxlamasın."*

**As soon as they realise the constitution provides certain powers to women – in this case, to gather publicly for a meeting – the same men who earlier rejoiced, top, immediately recoil from their support, bottom.**



*"Long live the Turkish constitution! Long live the reforms!"*

*"Osmanlı məşrutəsi və cavan türklər"*



*"Oh the horror! Is this reform? We don't need this kind of constitution!"*

Yaşasın Osmanlı azadlığı… Yaşasın məşrutə
*"Bay, bay! Bu imiş məşrutə? Yox, yox, bizə lazım deyil."*






**With only a mollah or only a khan, one cannot create a constitution. But put a khan and a mollah together and you've already got yourself a constitutional body.**

Bir molla ilə yainki bir xan ilə qanuni-əsasi olmaz, amma bir mollanın yanına bir xan da qoysaq, olar qanuni-əsasi. ('Molla Nəsrəddin')

Ayatollah Tabatabai feeds a bedridden Omar Faeq Namanzadeh with reforms ('Meshruteh', the Iranian reform movement is written on his sleeve) while the bespectacled Censor, left, and *Ijtihad* (a newspaper), right, observe coolly.




13-cü nömrədən mabə'd

**Continued from Issue 13**



Representing 'old traditions', left, and 'old sciences', right, respectively, two men stand in the way of a train labelled 'progress'. 'Regression' is written on the back of the cleric's head.




*"Qoymarıq qabağa gedəsən."*

***"We won't let you move forward."***



People from the Public Charity Committee come to pick up donations.

Cəmiyyəti-xeyriyyə tərəfindən vəkillər gəlirlər ianə yığmağa.



**Seeing them approach, the shop owner pretends to be asleep.**
***"I swear to God that the Haji has been asleep for two hours and I can't wake him up."***

(Vəkilləri görən kimi Haci uzanıb özünü verir yuxuya.)
Şağird: *"Ağalar, vallah Hacı iki saat olar ki, yuxulayır mən onu oyada bilmənəm."*



**The reforms (baby) are pulled in one direction by the old Turks and in the other by Kemal Pasha, aka Ataturk, while the Young Turks stand, center, with a knife ready to cut the reforms loose.**




**Ottoman reforms and the Young Turks**

Osmanlı məşrutəsi və cavan türklər

While a mutrib, a young boy in women's dress or the equivalent of a minstrel, dances for him, the Emir of Bukhara sits idly in a hammock, unaware that the 'Future' is cutting the strings holding it up.



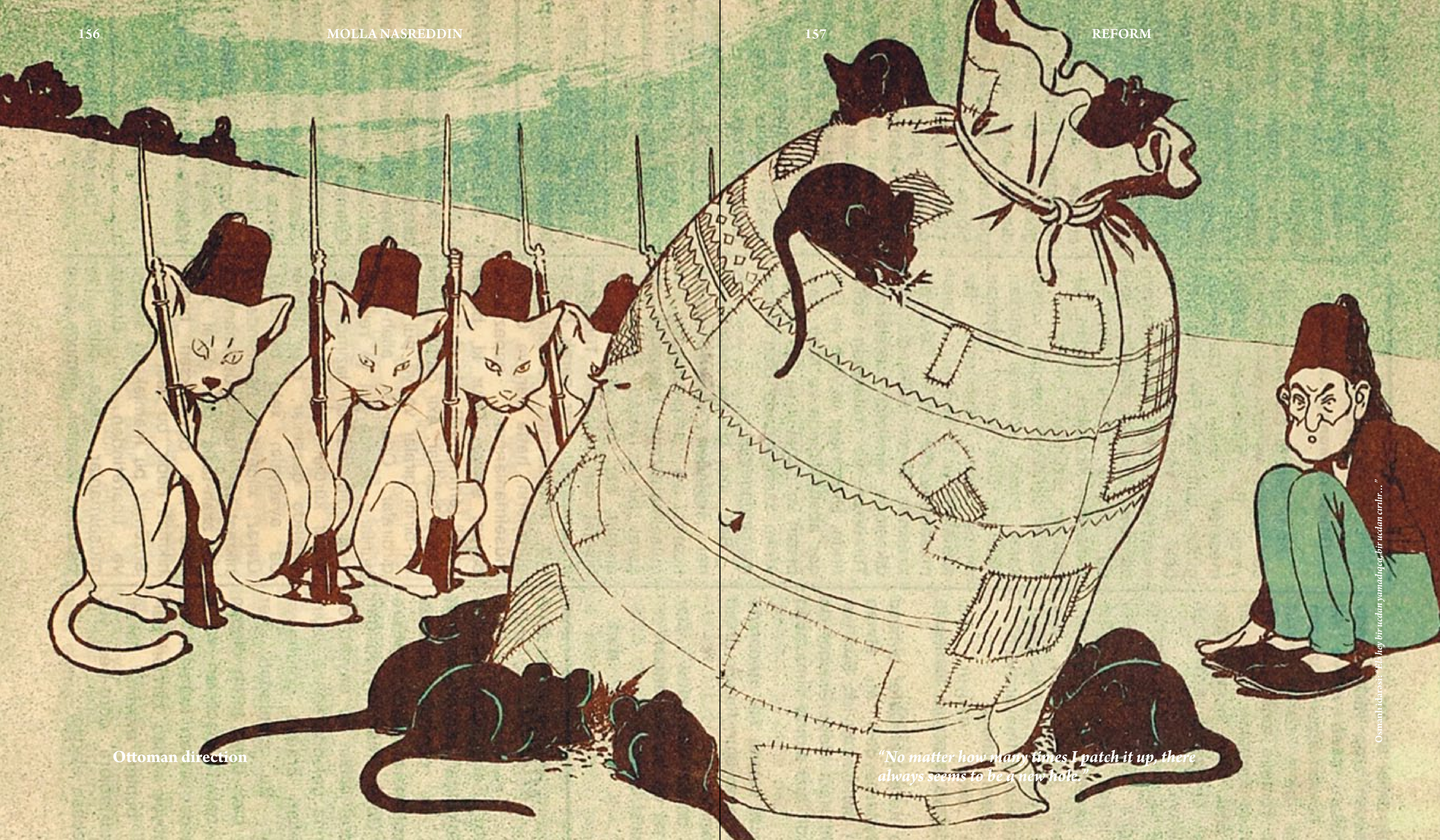



The Russian authorities viewed the religious classes of the Caucasus and Iran as allies who helped maintain the status quo. Below the phrase 'education with arms', a modern, educated Azeri takes aim at the spectre of a mollah in an attempt to get rid of archaic Islamic beliefs.




Rus misyonerləri həmişə deyirlər ki, "köhnə fikirli mollalar bizim mənəvi dostlarımızdır."

**The Solar Eclipse: Russian missionaries always say that the reactionary mollahs are our brothers in spirit.**



Ottoman direction

*"No matter how many times I patch it up, there always seems to be a new hole."*

Osmanlı idarəsi: *"Elə hey bir ucdan yamadıqca, bir ucdan cırılır…"*

*Molla Nasreddin* exposes the two-faced policy of government clerks who try to appease both parties by playing one off the other.




Rəiyyətə: *"Qoymanam konsul sizi incitsin, mən sizin tərəfdarınızam".*
Konsul: *"Bu nanəcib rəiyyətə heç rəhm lazım deyil."*

**To the peasant:** ***"Don't let the consulate shame you, I am on your side."***
**To the Consul:** ***"Don't worry at all about this peasant who lacks a conscience."***



**During the end of the Qajar's reign (1794-1925), national assets such as tobacco and oil were auctioned off to foreign bidders, in particular Britain and Russia. These foreign powers came to play a decisive role in helping quell the Constitutional Revolution, which they regarded as a liberal obstacle to their imperialist ambitions.**



*"Ay Tehranı alan, ay şirin Tehranı alan!..."* (Politika aləmindən)

***"Who wants to buy sweet Tehran?"***

# ISLAM

Islam is the bogeyman par excellence of *Molla Nasreddin*. An advocate of bourgeois European mores, the liberal journal saw in Islam all that held Muslims behind: superstitions instead of science, double standards instead of women's rights, collusion with colonial power instead of self-determination. In the latter years of the magazine's publication, the critique of Islam acquired a more vindictive tone, with the arrival of Bolshevism providing further fuel to the editorial staff's already inflamed anti-Islamic rhetoric. We do not agree with the weekly's position on Islam or religion in general but recognise the challenges *MN* was addressing, in society and in the role of the press. When viewed from the early 21st century, on the heels of the incendiary Danish cartoons of the Prophet, *MN* holds an unflattering mirror to the world in which we live: without recourse to the lofty, if ineffectual, laws protecting freedom of speech, *Molla Nasreddin* railed unflinchingly against what it considered to be the obstacles to progress.



At the turn of the 20th century in the Caucasus, Muslims dyed their beards red and shaved their heads as a demonstration of outward piety. The illustration pokes fun at the clerics who believe Tolstoy, already a canonical figure at the time, could benefit from a similar tradition.



Nömrə 46 Dördüncü il Səhifə 1

ملا نصر الدين

№46 Qiymәti 12 qәpik. МОЛЛА НАСРЕДДИНЪ Цена 12 k. №46



Litoq. S.Bovva

– Məşədi Pirverdi! Bu urusun saqqalı qırmızı olsaydı, ağıllı-başlı adamdı ha!
– Если бы у него борода была бы красная онъ быль бы умнее.

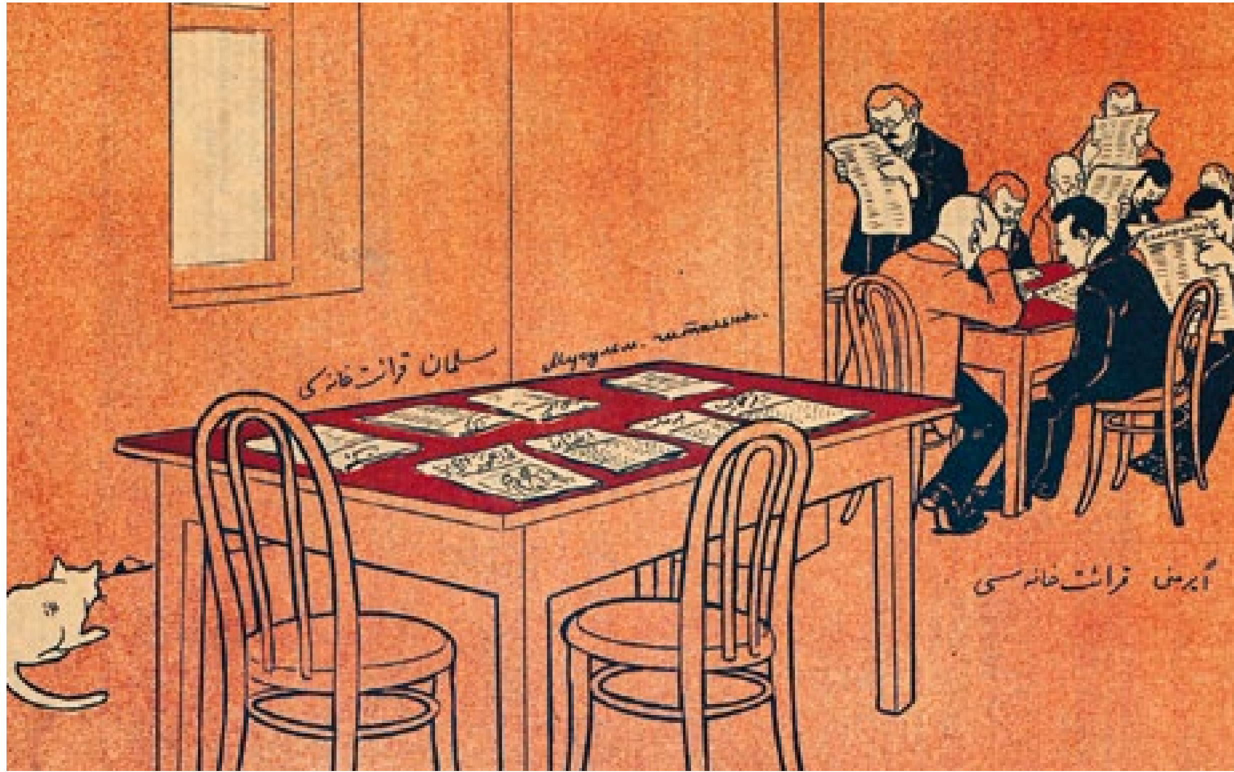
*"Look, if his beard were red, he would have been smarter."*

*"Məşədi Pirverdi! Bu urusun saqqalı qırmızı olsaydı, ağıllı-başlı adamdı ha!"*



Nə dəhəd mərdi-huşmənd cavab Məgər on ki kəzu sual künənd.

**A smart man is he who does not answer a question unless it is asked.**




Müsəlman qiraətxanasi. Erməni qiraətxanasi.

**Foreground: Muslim reading room**
**Background: Armenian reading room**






Həkim: *"Hər yüz ildə bir dəfə bu davadan içsən, inşallah, bu şüşə tamam olandan sonar şəfa taparsan…"*

**Doctor:** ***"If you drink this medicine once every 100 years, then when the bottle is empty, you will be cured."***

**The illustration deplores the sorry state of Azeri culture where actors cannot pay their own way and subsequently become indebted to hotel owners.**

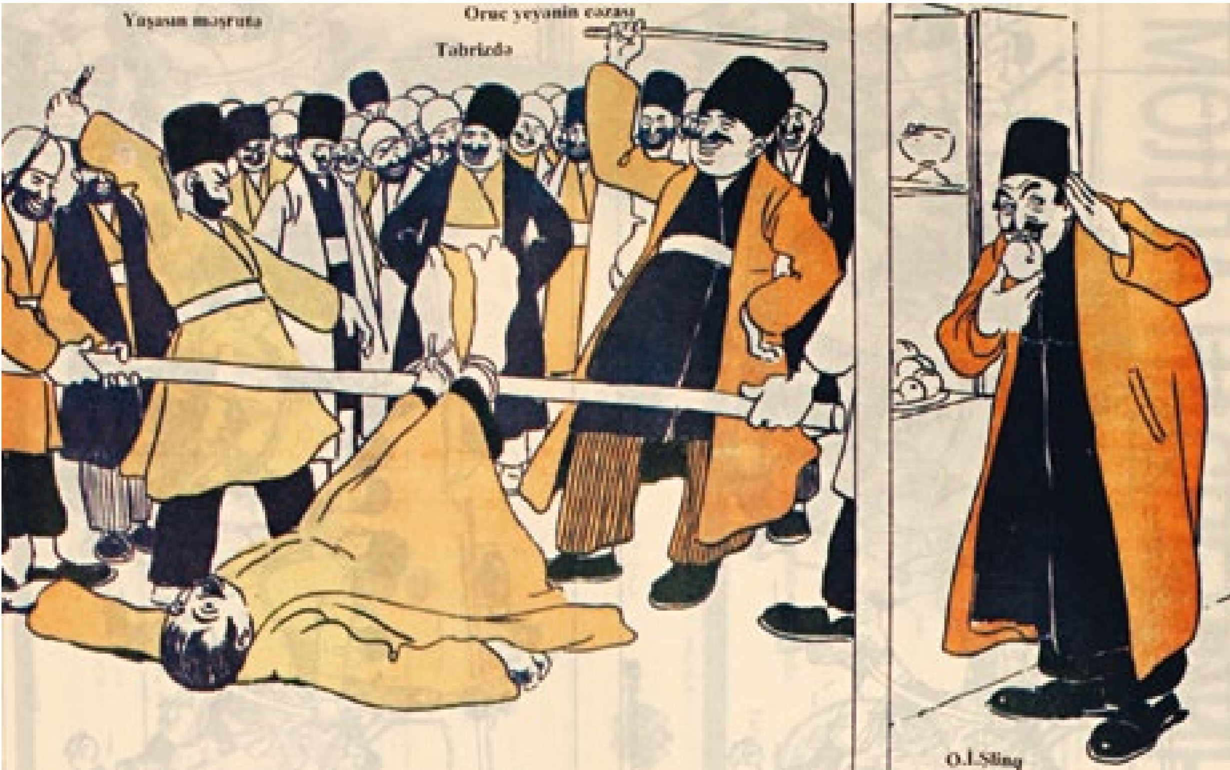



*"Balam, yavaş-yavaş yerinin ki, borc sahibləri görməsinlər, yoxsa yapişarlar yaxamızdan, ötürməzlər."*

***"Quiet! Walk out without making any noise. If not, the person we borrowed money from will find out and won't let us leave!"***



**Despite its strong following amongst the leaders of the Constitutional Revolution, *Molla Nasreddin* treated the movement with suspicion due to the ineluctable role played by religion. The reformers of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution here yell 'Long Live the Constitution!' ('Yaşasin meşrutə!') while doling out traditional punishments.**




**The 'constitutional' punishment for someone who doesn't keep fast during Ramadan in Tabriz.**

**Ruzi-şənbə səyyüm du nəfər qəhvəxana nəzdiki0meydani Sahibüləmr rozeyi-xodeşanra mxordənd əz-tərəfi-nəzmiyyə giriftar və bəhər yek səd taziyanə zədə xodeşanra həbs kərdənd. (Ruznaməyi 'İstiqlal' nömrə 21)**

**The man with the water jug is actually going to the toilet but shamelessly uses prayer as an excuse to avoid his interlocutor.**




*"Kərbəlayi Məmmədhüseyn, dayan bir, söz deyirəm."*
*"Yavaş səbir elə, namazımın vaxtı keçir."*

***"Listen, Kerbalai, to what I am telling you!"***
***"Wait, I am on my way to pray …"***

**The seemingly pious Azeri Muslim delivers two chickens, a relative luxury, to the hotel room of his Russian mistress.**




*"Ay kişi, bu, toyuq-cücələri hara aparırsan?"*
*Bülbüləli qoca kişi cavab verir: "Fransa qəstinində qadasını aldığım Marusa xanıma peşkəş aparıram".*

***"Where you taking that chicken, Kerbalai?"***
***"I am taking it as a gift to my Ms. Marusia at the hotel."***






Tiflis müsəlmanları tərəfindən hökumətə ərizə:
*"Biz ərizəyə qol çəkən müsəlmanlar fahişəxananın məhəlləmizə gəlməyinə razıyıq və min dəfə razıyıq."*

**The Tbilisi Muslims issue a request to the local government:**
***"We all agree with the objectives set out in the document and are duly convinced of the need to open a brothel in the Muslim quarter."***

**In traditional Muslim societies, the man walks a certain distance in front of the woman.**



**Husband and wife**
*"Listen, husband, come help me!"*

Ər və övrət
*„Ay kişi qoyma, bu itlər məni kepdi."*



Tiflisdə Rusiya tatarlarının toyu

**Russian Tatar wedding in Tbilisi**



ələ bir paralar deyirlər ki, müsəlmanlar Avropa mədəniyyətini çətinlik ilə əxz eliyirlər. İndi gəlsinlər bura görüm o yalançılar!

**And they say that Muslims are not receptive to 'Russian culture'!**






*"Oradan bir 'Həqiqət' qəzetəsi ver?"* Qəzet satan: *"Biz müsəlman qəzetəsi saxlamırıq. O səbəbə ki, dünya xəlq olunandan indiyədək sən əvvəlinci müsəlmansan ki, müsəlman qəzetəsi istəyirsən."*

***"Do you have* Haqiqat *newspaper?"***
***"We don't carry Muslim papers. For one simple reason: you're the first person ever to ask for one."***

**Yet another position upon which fundamentalist Muslims and Evangelical Christians could get together and share best practices.**



**It doesn't hurt to always bear arms …**






**… as it is necessary for both praying and for fighting.**

Yarax silah saxlamaq ehtiyat üçün hamıya vacibdir. Məhərrəmlikdə
də lazım olur quldurluqda da.

**The seemingly pious man can no longer restrain himself from sensual pleasures: one month after making the most important pilgrimage, the hajj to Mecca, he asks a mollah for a temporary marriage license that will grant him permission to be with a woman.**




Məkkədən təze gələndə

**Just back from Mecca**



Bir həftədən sonar

**A week later**



Bir aydan sonra

**A month later**





*„Zəiflər mən dediyiniz qiymətə raziyam, amma bu şərtilən ki, siz qaçasınız mən hansınızı tutsam şər'i malım olsun!"*

***"Listen, I am fine with the prices. I just request one thing: that you run away and I try to catch one of you. The one I get will be halal."***



*„Gəl zəifə, gəl, əsirəmsən, əsirəmsən!!!"*

***"Come here, honey, you'll be my booty."***

**During the Ashura-Tasua ceremonies commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hossein ibn Ali, participants flagellate themselves with chains or inflict wounds on their foreheads with swords as a sign of both solidarity and grief that they were not present to save Hossein and his family.**




*“Ana, neçə gündür acından ölürəm, mənə çörək.” “Bala, ata on gündü başını yarıb, naxoş olub, işə gedə bilmir. Ağlama, bir az sakit ol, bəlkə gedəm qonşudan bir tikə çörək alam.”*

***“Mama, I haven’t eaten for several days. I am dying of hunger.”***
***“My child, your father injured himself during Ashura-Tasua and has been recovering for ten days. Be patient. Allah will help.”***



**Despite dreams of grandeur in the Imperial capital of St. Petersburg, top, from Muslim universities to Muslim theatres to Mosques, in reality, bottom, the Muslims are fast asleep, living a fantasy.**




**The future of St. Petersburg according to the Muslims (if no one gives them the evil eye)**

Peterburqda müsəlmanların gələceyi (əgər bədnəzər qoysa)




**Relax, it’s all going to be fine. No one will bother you.**

Quluqlarım dinc, özüm də rahat.

# EDUCATION

Whether it was child labour, the oppression of women or the Azeri language, *Molla Nasreddin* turned to education reform as the single most effective means to achieve progress. Highly influenced by Jadidism, the Muslim educational reform movement in late 19th century Russia, the magazine often underlined the barriers to reformist teachers in the Caucasus: conspiring religious clerics, ineffectual Russian authorities and old-fashioned superstitions. *MN* reserves the bulk of its enmity, however, for the religious establishment, which it depicts as pitched in battle against any modernisation initiatives.



**A father addresses his son outside of a gambling venue.**




***"Son, no need to go to school today. I've got a meeting at home and I'll need your help."***

**Bu gün məktəbə getmə, oğlum:** ***"evdə bu gün yığıncaq var, mənə gərək kömək eləyəsən..."***

**Instead of books or exercises, teacher and students have only pistols.**

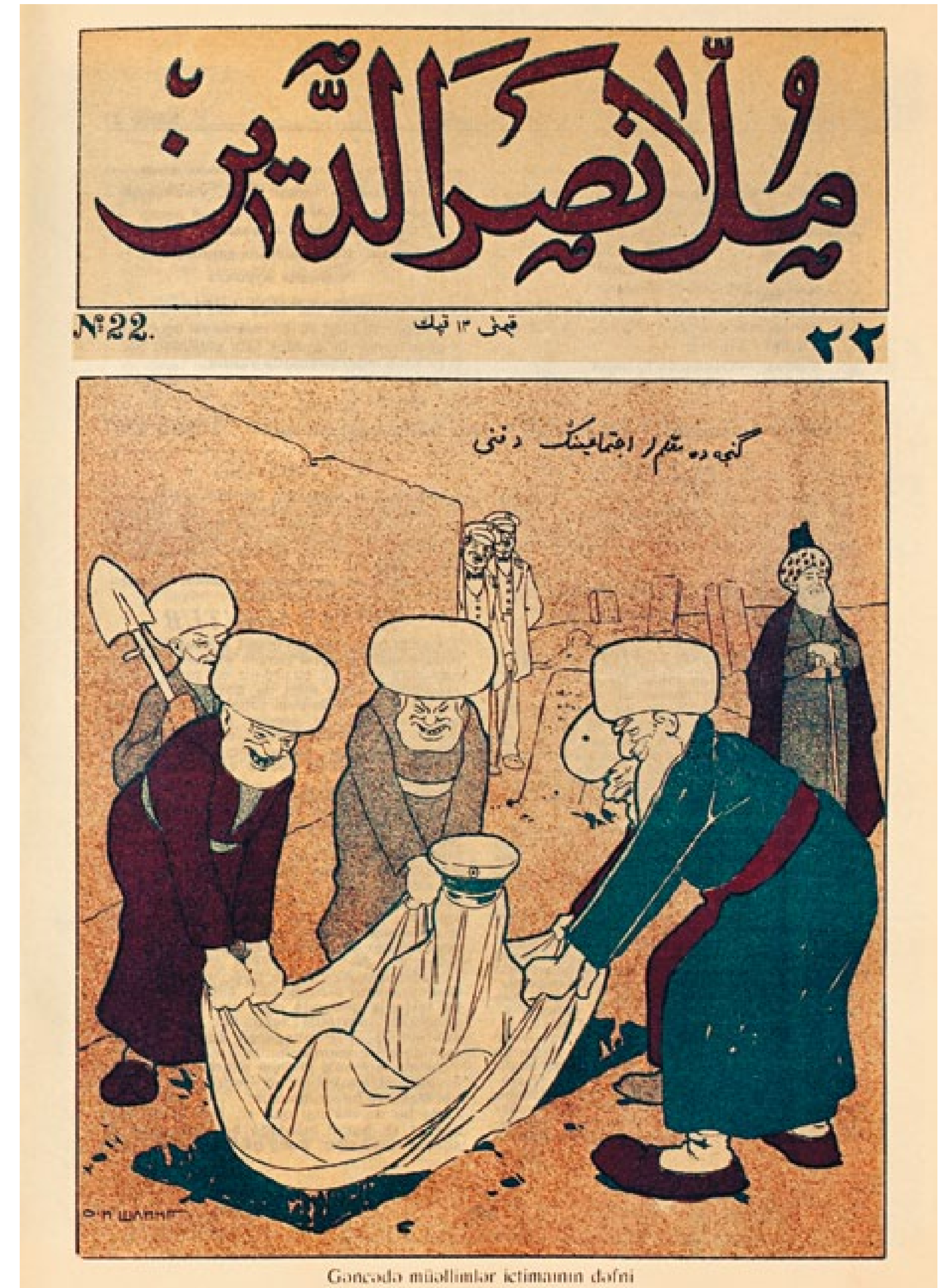



**Exams at Baku's technical school**

Baki realni şkolasinda imtahan



**Opposed to educational reform, the mollahs rejoice as they bury the teacher in Ganjeh, Azerbaijan's second largest city. The Russian officers, in the distance, are accomplices, having closed the school on the Tsar's decree.**




**The teacher's community buried in Ganjeh**

Gəncədə müəllimlər ictimamim dəfni

At an elementary school, the teacher shirks his responsibilities by sleeping and thinking up silly assignments for his students.



*"The first one to catch 40 flies while I sleep, I'll let go home."*

*"Mən durana kimi hər kəs qırx mirçək tutsa onu azad eləyəcəyəm."* (Gəncədə)

The old teachers are chased off for being too secular and moderate: according to Azeri Muslim tradition at the time, a pious man should have a shaved head and a red beard.



*"You will suffer the same fate if you don't shave your head."*

*"Bax sən də köhnələr kimi başını qırxdırmasan, bu qulağından yapışıb səni də salarıx eşiyə."*



A mujtahid is an Islamic scholar able to interpret sharia (divine law) in a given situation using ijtihad (practical thought).




*"Who is your Mujtahid?"*

*"...Kabla Qurban, təqlidin kimədi?"*



Dərslər başlanan günlər

**The beginning of courses**



**A clear critique of the role of education in Muslim Azeri society versus Russian (Christian) society.**




Dərslər başlanan vaqt müsəlman kitabxanası

**The beginning of courses at a Muslim school**

**Truant Azeri kids tease the Armenian kids on their way to school. To borrow from the lexicon of American pop culture, *Molla Nasreddin* sees the Armenian kids as well-behaved, if somewhat nerdy, and the Azeris as bad boys: naughty but cool.**



***"Look! The Armenians are passing by!"***

*"Ermәni hay ermәni!"*

**The inset picture shows the Baku School for Muslim Women, founded by the philanthropist Haji Zeinalabdin Tagiev. Today the building houses the Institute of Manuscripts. Girls coming to Baku from the provinces were not forewarned of its closure and many found themselves on the street without a place to stay. In the end, their fathers were notified to collect them.**




**What a waste of a building!! Due to Ramadan (the month of fasting), the school is closed for one month.**

**Heyf bu imarәtә!! Bir ay orucluğu Mәryәm xanım Mәrdәkanda Hacının bağında qalib oruc tutacaq. Özgә şәhәrlәrdәn gәlәn qızlar qalıblar küçәdә, bilmirlәr hara getsinlәr axırda atalarına tel vurublar ki, gәlib aparsınlar.**






***"Even Sheikholislam has signed up his daughters at the Saint Nina school. It's over. We're finished."***

*"Vay bizim halımza! Şeyxülislam da qızlarını 'Svyataya Nina' mәktәbinә imtahana gәtirib. Evimiz yıxıldı! Din әldәn getdi!..."*

**The student recites the Koran. Instead of performing his duties as instructor, though, the cleric earns extra money moonlighting with freelance assignments, such as this personalised prayer.**




*"Axund Qəfərullahləkə…"*
*"Ay qoduq, bu saat eşiyə getmədin, qoymazsan övrətin duasını yazıb qurtarım…"*

*"Akhund gheferullahlekeh."*
*"Be quiet! Don't bother me! Can't you see I'm writing a prayer for this woman?"*





*"Bala, durma get işləməyə." (Şəkidə)*

*"Son, go to work."*



*"Bərəkallah, oğlan, burda genə gündə on qəpik qazanarsan: məktəbdə nə var?"*

**(in a silk factory):** *"Good work, kid. You make at least 10 kopecks here, so what exactly do you want school for?"*



Ata oğluna: "'Veçer' dən yığılan haram pulnan açılan məktəbə mən səni qoymanam gedəsən..."

*"During 34 years of studying, I have studied 73 sciences and built up a fortress of knowledge, but I'm afraid to take a breath because it could all collapse."*



**Many of the first schools in the Caucasus were financed by money from European nations or organisations. 'Haram' means 'forbidden'.**




Ata oğluna: "'Veçer' dən yığılan haram pulnan açılan məktəbə mən səni qoymanam gedəsən..."

**Father to son:** ***"Over my dead body will I let you go to a school financed by the charitable 'haram' money of infidels!"***

The crowds blame astrological events for the dismissal of reformist teachers at a Muslim school in Tbilisi.

The teachers from Ittifaq school in Tbilisi are fired.

*"All these misfortunes are due to Galileo's comet"*

Tiflisdə 'Ittifaq' məktəbinin əzl olunmuş müəllimləri.

*"Bu bədbəxtliklərin hamısı quyruqlu ulduzun təsiridir."*

**Though it is not made explicit, the language the students are forced to learn is Russian. From the early 19th century to the fall of the USSR in the late 20th century, the Russian language was used not only as a means of colonisation but also as a tool of education across the Caucasus.**




**Şagirdlər:** ***"Ay mirzə, bax bizim də dilimiz var, sən Allah, qoy onu da bir az öyrənək."***
**Müəllim:** ***"Yox, olmaz! Türk dili olmaz! Gərək bunu soxam boğazınıza."***

**Students:** ***"Mirza, we also have our own tongue. Let us study it a bit also."*** **Teacher:** ***"No. Azeri Turk is forbidden. I need to stuff this language into your mouth."***



**Arabic, Rhetoric, Grammar, Handwriting, Natural sciences, Arithmetic and Religion have been stuffed into the student while Farsi, Algebra and Turkish remain to be fed.**




**1st grade at Ittifaq school**

Ittifaq məktəbində Əvvəlimci şöbə

**The Azeri protests at the various attempts to impose other languages – left to right: Arab, Russian, Farsi – onto his mother tongue, Azeri Turk.**




***"Dear brothers, I already have a tongue so why are you trying to put others into my mouth!"***

*"Ay qardaşlar mə ki dilsiz xəlq olunmamışam, bu dilləri ağzima soxursunuz."*



**Both representatives of the Third Duma, the right-wing Monarchist Vladimir Pureshkevic, right, and F.F. Timoshkin, left, a nationalist who was elected head of the Russian population of the Caucasus, cut off the Azeri man's mother tongue, top, and proceed to sew him a new Russian tongue, bottom.**





**At school, Russian is the only maternal tongue.**

**Məktəblərdə rus dilindən savayı gərək özgə ana dili oxunmuya.**

# PRESS

Launched during a period of frantic publishing activity, *Molla Nasreddin* immediately distinguished itself with its acerbic tone, Azeri-Turkish language (instead of Russian or Istanbuli Turkish) and of course, the illustrations which made the magazine accessible to a whole slew of largely illiterate readers. The weekly engaged in debate with its more conservative counterparts such as *Tazə Hayat* or the pro-Ottoman *Füyuzat* and had a considerable influence on Iranian periodicals during the Constitutional Revolution such as *Nasim-e Shomal* (1907-11) published in Rasht and Sur-e Esrafil (1907-08) in Tehran. In short, it was a heyday for pamphleteers and polemicists, a climate which today would be the envy of newspapermen, fanzine aficionados and bloggers. Despite the Russian Empire's strict censorship laws and increasing instability in the region with the arrival of Bolshevism, *Molla Nasreddin* stayed its course of progressive dissent for the better part of a truly difficult decade.



A critique of the self-centered and petty attitude of the mollah who should ostensibly be concerning himself with more important matters.




*"My God, I wonder what those newspapers are writing about me in there."*

*"Pərvərdigara, görəsən bu qəzetələr mənim barəmdə nə yazırlar…"*

**The coffin bears the name *Hayat*, a conservative newspaper which folded and was replaced by the more traditionalist *Tazə Hayat*. In staunch opposition to *Molla Nasreddin's* secular liberalism, *Tazə Hayat* saw Islam as the bedrock of Azeri culture.**






**The mollahs are incensed that the writers, pamphleteers and journalists in the neighbouring room dare to call themselves Muslim. Today, a similar battle rages across the Muslim world regarding what constitutes a 'true' Muslim.**



***"They say: 'We are also Muslims.'"***

*"Onlar da deyirlər ki, 'biz də musulmanıx.'"*

**A page censored by the authorities.**



**For reasons beyond of our control, this page is empty.**

**Bizdən asılmayan səbəbə bu yer boş qaldi.**

**The pumpkins feature the names of different publications of the period from the Caucasus, including *Nour, Ershad, Dabestan*, and *Azad*. The beginning of the 20th century saw printing activities burgeon across the Russian Empire due to the relaxation of censorship laws by Nicholas II in response to the mass political and social unrest which culminated in the 1905 Revolution. Despite the wide variety of titles on offer and rare liberalisation of censorship laws, there were, alas, comparatively few readers.**

*"It's impossible to grow any more than this, peace be unto Allah. But what am I to do with so many?"*



*"Dəxi bundan artıq hasil olmaz, allah bərəkət versin. Amma di gəl ki bu qədəri mən kimə satacağam?"*

**Religious clerics beat Ismail Bek Gasprinski with declarations of Shari'ia and accusations of infidelity. A Crimean Tatar, Gasprinski was a founder of Jadidism, a movement aimed at reforming Islam primarily through education. He holds a progressive publication in his hand, *Terğüman* ('Translator'), which was heavily influenced by *Molla Nasreddin*.**






**In a show of bravado, the illustration demonstrates that despite the religious establishment's disapproval of *Molla Nasreddin*, the clerics still read it, if secretly.**




***"Listen, son, go buy a copy of* Molla Nasreddin *but don't tell anyone."***

*"Oğlan, apar bu üç şahını, bir Molla Nəsrəddin al gətir, amma bir kəsə demə."*




*"... Qəzet, qəzet, təzə xəbərlər: Balkan işləri, Osmanlı, Avstriya, Bolğar xəbərləri..."*

***"Today's paper! Read all about it! Events in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, news from Bulgaria, Austria ... !"***



**The dynamic has been reversed: whereas five years ago the writer admonished the censors who recoil in fear, later it is the censors who bully writers. The situation is more difficult to caricature in the early 21st century, as writers and journalists do the job of the authorities by censoring themselves.**




**Five years ago**

**Beş il bundan qabaq**




**Today**

**Indi**

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*Slavs and Tatars Presents Molla Nasreddin: the magazine that would've, could've, should've*

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The Azeri language re-edition of *Molla Nəsrəddin* is an initiative of the National Academy of Science's Nizami Institute of Literature and has been published by Azərbaycan Dövlət Nəşriyyatı (volumes 1-2) and Çinar-Çap Nəşriyyatı (volumes 3-8).

Printed and Bound by Die Keure, Brugge, Belgium. Produced in Europe.
This publication is part of the artists' books series Christoph Keller Editions published by JRP|Ringier, Zurich.




Slavs and Tatars is a faction of polemics and intimacies devoted to an area east of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China known as Eurasia.


This book was made with the generous support of the Allahverdova and Safarov families.

Slavs and Tatars would like to thank the Allahverdova and Safarov families for supporting the project; Evan Siegel for his help with translations, singular research into Azeri literary and intellectual history, and dedication to contemporary Iranian politics; Christoph Keller, Nic Iljine, Shirley Elghanian and MOP, Iradj Bagherzadeh, Anna Dyulgerova, Betty Blair, Aidan Salakhova, Joerg Koch, Liza Eliano, Dave Harper, Paddy Johnson (artfagcity.com), Rita and Marc Janssen, Roger Conover, Shumon Basar, Negar Azimi, Babak Radboy, the Bidoun Team, Antonia Carver, Art Dubai, and The Third Line.

This book would not have been possible without the generous support of the Contemporary City Foundation.

*Slavs and Tatars Presents Molla Nasreddin: the magazine that would've, could've, should've* is a recipient of a grant from Magic of Persia.

Современный Город Фонд

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PUBLISHED BY
JRP|Ringier
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CH-8047 Zurich
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ISBN 978-3-03764-212-2
9 783037 642122